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THE GOLDEN BAIT.

A Novel.

By HENRY HOLL,

AUTHOR OF

"THE KING'S MAIL," "THE OLD HOUSE IN CROSBY SQUARE,"

"MORE SECRETS THAN ONE," "THE WHITE FAVOUR,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE GOLDEN BAIT.

CHAPTER I.

A REQUEST.

ALL was now known. All fully understood, and Margaret knew that she had only herself to blame for what had taken place, and that her own waywardness had been the cause of all her sorrow. Her want of trust had met a proper recompense, and now at last, when it was too late, and she knew the reason of her lover's silence, she also knew that she was irrevocably plighted to another, and must submit to her unhappiness.

It was his turn now to tax her with inconstancy, and say that she had deceived him ! He had been true where she had been false. He had been loyal where she had been changeful, and, truthful even in the midst of sickness and of pain, would he not regard her treatment of him with abhorrence, and contrast his own true-heartedness with her fickle, and most worthless protestations of undying love.

Oh ! could that past but come again, or her hasty promise be recalled, how gladly would she have fallen upon her knees and thanked her God for her release from misery ! A life of penury and woe, contrasted with that stranger's wealth, and all his wealth could buy, would be a happiness beyond comparison, and nothing be left to wish for, or desire, so that Frederick and herself could be as they once were, and the fatal " Yes " be unsaid that bound her to another.

Would Ellerton free her from her engagement and release her if she requested it ? or would he tax her with dishonourable conduct, and say she had promised what she never meant to perform. Would he not taunt and storm at her, grow wild with jealousy—and in revenge attempt some desperate mischief on the man she loved ? For his sake more than for her own, she felt that must not be ; but that what she had been betrayed into through her haste and indiscretion she must take the consequences of, and submit to in just atonement for her fault.

She had only partially recovered from her swoon, when the full force of her misery struck upon her heart and told her that from that time forward she had no hope ; but that the bitterest self-reproach would wait upon her, and torment her, every hour of her life.

She knew that she must suffer, and prepared to endure her punishment without complaining. She thought she had strength and fortitude left for that, and that she could hide her grief even from the eyes of those who loved her best. But there was one thing she could not do ; stand quietly by and listen to her great-aunt's cruel observations without protesting against her meanness and injustice.

She had borne too much already, and had been made the object of every possible and impossible conjecture. Her sudden indisposition, instead of exciting pity, had created in her great-aunt's mind a cloud of vague suspicions, and then, not being able to fix on one especially, she had fallen back on base insinuations and unjustifiable conclusions : taunted till she was tired of taunting ; flew out at her for her want of delicacy in fainting before company, and said that if she wanted to swoon she might surely have gone out of the room first, and avoided getting up a scene purely for the sake of creating an effect.

This was too much ! Weak and exhausted though she was, Margaret could no longer control her indignant feelings, but in sudden passion upbraided Priscilla for her heartlessness so forcibly that the spinster had much ado to keep

her hands off her, and caused so great a commotion on their return home, that the Captain lost his patience too, and nearly had a battle royal with his charmer because he took Margaret's part and found fault with her. But the Captain's blood was roused, and bitterly reproaching himself for what he had done and said, he stood ready to defy Miss Hindmarsh then and there, cast back her houses in her teeth, and like a true champion, espouse the weakest side although he suffered with it.

He had been shrewd enough to perceive that Margaret had been kept in ignorance of his pupil's illness (though why she had entered into an engagement with another exceeded his comprehension). One thing at all events he promised to himself; and that was, on his return to Knaresborough, and as soon as Frederick was well enough to bear the shock, to inform him of all he knew respecting her; and though he could not hope to alter matters as they at present stood, he did not doubt he should be able to convince him, that though her hand was promised to another, her heart was irrevocably his.

The evening passed at Mr. Blissett's had not proved so pleasant as expected. Ellerton was restless and impatient, and, out of humour with himself and everybody, he regarded Margaret's

indisposition, if not exactly with suspicion, yet with an unaccountable feeling bordering on distrust. Her mother of course expressed herself alarmed and uneasy at her daughter's illness, but as she was unacquainted with the true reason, she put it down to the heat of the room, the supper, or a dozen other causes—all but the right one.

Miss Hindmarsh, on the contrary, attributed it to tight-lacing, and to the ridiculous habit girls had of screwing in their waists, instead of leaving nature alone, and the waist to spread. She was so satisfied and convinced of this, that though the subject was one she did not like to dwell upon in the presence of gentlemen, yet as she had a chance of saying something spiteful about her niece, she kept Ellerton full ten minutes at the street-door telling him of what she thought, until he wished her at the bottom of the sea, and the Captain tied neck and heels to her.

Having done all she could to disgust him, and being in excellent humour for finding fault, she no sooner saw Ellerton depart, than she went into the parlour to find fault with her niece as well for allowing her daughter to conduct herself so outrageously. Then followed the scene of Margaret's indignation and of the Captain's almost

positive rebellion, which, when luckily got over, he thought it time to be going, he having to find a bed somewhere in the neighbourhood; the sleeping accommodation at Mrs. Rushbrook's being insufficient, even if Miss Hindmarsh would have consented to his taking up his quarters under the same roof with herself.

Now the Captain was placed in this dilemma. He had not the most distant notion of where he was, in what part of London, or what direction he should take to find a bed. Mrs. Rushbrook offered to send the servant with him; but Priscilla would not hear of it, nor would the Captain. He had a spirit superior to being shown his way by a woman, and would rather have walked the streets all night, than put himself in so contemptible a position. But there was no help for it. Priscilla would not let him go by himself for fear he should get into bad company, nor with the servant, for fear of worse; until it was arranged that the girl should go beforehand, and engage a bed at the coffee-house in the next street.

The bed bespoken, the girl offered good-naturedly enough to show the gentleman the way, at which audacious proposition Priscilla flew out at her like a tigress, and so rated the girl for her impertinence, that she did not feel inclined to take it, but flew out in her turn; and telling

Miss Hindmarsh to mind her own business and not meddle with her, for she would not stand it, got the better of the fight by force of words.

Had Priscilla fallen from the top of the Monument, she could not have been more perfectly bewildered than by the girl's insolence. She to talk to her! and— But the Captain put a stop to further altercation by buttoning his coat, and with a flourish of his cane prepared to go, while the servant pointed out the right turns to take from the bottom step, and Priscilla watched them from the top, and never took her eyes away or gave them a chance of exchanging signals, until a lamp-post at the corner of the street completely shut him out, and left her wondering what had become of him.

The Captain was an early riser. Punctual to the minute he was up, and shaved, and dressed; and as the clock struck eight, he left his bedroom, prepared to do full justice to his breakfast, and astonish the coffee-house keeper by his capacity of stomach, which, considering his size, was formidable.

His astonishment may be imagined, when on entering the coffee-room, he encountered—not a smoking rasher, and a couple of new-laid eggs—but Margaret, who begged him to excuse the

liberty she had taken in coming to him, and forgive her what she had to say.

“Forgive you, my precious girl! Why, I would run to the furthest corner of the earth to do you a service; do anything to prove my devotion to you, and make amends for what must have appeared little less than barbarity, when I spoke last night of what had happened to our friend, in so sudden and abrupt a manner.”

“It is that which brought me here—it is that which has kept me sleepless all the night, and made me venture to come to you in hopes you might listen to me, and do a father’s part by a most unhappy daughter. Oh, sir! you do not know what I have suffered, you cannot even guess at my distress; and were I to tell it you a thousand times, you could never imagine the agony and despair with which I listened to what you said of what had happened since I saw you last.”

“I was a brute, my love—positively a barbarian—and I shall never forgive myself for the suffering I occasioned you. You were evidently unprepared for the information. That I discovered when it was too late. But being a little angry with you (forgive me, if I say so) for what I conceived to be a forgetfulness on your part to the claims of a suffering friend, and having heard

of your engagement to another, I could not help making some reference to poor Frederick, with a view to ascertain how far your sympathies were enlisted in his favour, and learn by your manner the true state of your feelings towards him."

"Your reproof was kindly meant, and, had I been the heartless creature you thought me, far too kind and gentle to express what you thought of me! But that is not the case. I loved him with my whole heart, and would gladly have parted with my life to do him good. I would have done it, and not talked of it, had Frederick requested it of me."

"How, then, has this evil come about, and by what unaccountable means did you consent to engage yourself to another, at the very time that Frederick—"

The Captain had evidently got a piece of dust in his eye—at least, he appeared to have—for he kept rubbing it as if to get it out. But it was a tear, not dust, that blinded him, and fast as he wiped it away, another and another came, until his eyes were full, and he could hardly see.

"Oh, sir! the engagement to which you have alluded is to me the bitterest regret, since acting on a mistaken impulse, I have entailed on myself a life-long misery; and nothing that I can ever do will alter my condition, or make me less

unhappy than I am. I am lost to Frederick, lost to myself, and not a hope or comfort remains to me in the whole world by which I can look forward to enjoy life, or find relief from the misery I endure."

"But how—" said the Captain, clearing his throat, and placing Margaret tenderly in a chair, "pray tell me—how did this mistake occur? It could not be a trivial circumstance that influenced your conduct, or made your gentle nature suddenly grow cold towards your lover. I will never believe you did so willingly—unless, indeed, you had been imposed upon, or were induced to think, that Frederick first of all forgot you."

"I *was* imposed upon! I was told that he had forgotten me, and though I struggled against suspicion, and endeavoured with all my woman's faith to think him true, I thought I had sufficient reason for distrusting him at last! He never replied to me—took no notice of me; and though I begged and entreated him to write, he never answered my letter, but treated me with indifference and contempt."

"Poor fellow! he was unable to reply. Laid upon a sick bed he had not strength to write, even presuming your letter reached him, which I doubt."

"I know it now—but it is too late, and re-

flection only adds to my despair, when I consider that the fault was mine, not his. It was I who doubted. It was my want of faith that questioned his, until at last, at the very time I loved him better than I loved myself, I cast him off in foolish girlish anger, and consented to my misery, to gratify my pride."

"As I suspected. A little intercession, and a little mischief-making skilfully applied——"

"Stung with my sense of wrong, and urged by my father's dying wishes that I should marry this rich stranger, I listened to my mother's solicitation; abandoned all my hopes, and cast myself on the protection of a man, that as my future husband I am bound to honour, but shall ever shrink from, as the cause of all my wretchedness. However wicked this may be, and undeserved by him, I feel it is to be so, and that nothing he can ever do will lessen my despair or reconcile me to my fate."

"Poor girl! poor unoffending sufferer, and all occasioned by this fatal sickness and your ignorance of the reason of your lover's silence. But Mr. Ellerton is no doubt a man of honour, and though not in the army he may have the feelings of a gentleman, and if appealed to, may magnanimously consent to relieve you of your engagement."

“Never! He has bought me fairly. He has bargained for and won me with his gold, and obstinate in his right, he will hold me to my contract. I know him, and therefore see no chance of a release by any yielding on his part.”

“But if I urge it on him, and, in the event of a refusal, challenge him, and by a lucky shot——”

“I am bound in honour; my word is given, and though by keeping it I sacrifice the peace of my existence, I’ll keep it fairly, and at the least, make good my second promise though I broke my first. There is but one thing left to do—and I must trust to your considerate kindness to make it easy to me, or I may not have the strength to go through with it. But if I beg it as a favour I am sure you will not refuse me, will you?”

“There is nothing in the power of man I will not undertake to do, to be thought worthy of your regard. There is no impediment that the courage and determination of a poorly gifted individual like myself can compass, I will not do; and at all times and seasons, I beg you will believe, you have a devoted servant in Conroy Nubbleton; one who is both willing and anxious to do the best he can to serve you, and contribute to your happiness.”

“Will you then—” But here her words almost failed her. “Will you tell Frederick how this wretchedness was brought about, and how through my folly, I am punished for my fault. Will you, from me, beg and entreat his pardon, and tell him that though I slighted him, and cruelly mistrusted him, I have abandoned all hope since I lost him, and what a wretched creature I am likely to prove separated from him, and left to the misery of my own reproaches to the end of my weary and distressful life. It is not much I ask, and yet——”

The Captain turned as if to speak to her, but his tears fell so fast, he had enough to do to wipe them off; so he gave over the attempt, and expressed his sympathy by looks instead.

“I need not tell you, I am sure, what I have suffered; your good and generous heart will imagine that; for though at present I feel stunned and callous with my excess of grief, the pain I have gone through before I could arrive at this dead sense of misery is witnessed by my sleepless nights, the ceaseless agony that oppresses me, and which will cling to me like my shadow to my body through every hour of my life. Oh do you think he will forgive me? Will he forget and pardon, and out of the deep love he once bore me, consent to listen to my penitence, and

believe in the prayers I raise to Heaven for his peace and happiness?"

Falling on her knees and clasping the Captain's hands in hers, she begged and prayed of him to speak to her—but he could not, though he endeavoured by his action to assure her he would do as she wished, and that no doubt Frederick would forgive her, and bless her, in spite of all his sufferings for her loss.

"If," she resumed, still on her knees, and drawing closer and closer to his side, "if he will only do this gentle mercy by me, and consent that I may think of him, and love him, where no thought of sin can come—here in my heart—which no one sees, and never guesses at its silent workings, except the God who views and watches everything—then I will try and keep his memory alive, and nurse it fondly, till death comes like a gentle dream upon me and summons me away to meet his dear loved face in heaven."

Overcome by her emotions, and bursting into an agony of tears, she would have fallen had not the Captain caught her in his arms, and soothed her, and pressed her to his breast, and comforted her with the assurance of his devotion to her service.

"By the faith and honour of a gentleman," he said; "by all the sacred obligations which can bind a man to the service of the ladies, I will

discharge the trust you have reposed in me faithfully and well. I will endeavour by all means in my power to do credit to your confidence, and please heaven, I may be the means of reconciling our poor friend to endure his loss with fortitude, and acquit you of all blame in this most unhappy business. May it so prove, I may be permitted to bear to him the assurance of your unaltered love, and that he may be satisfied the fault was not in you, but in others, and that his admiration of your sense of honour and the greatness of the sacrifice you make, may stimulate him to endure his misery like a man, and behold in you the perfect excellence of an upright, though most suffering woman."

The promise was given—Margaret returned home, and the Captain did *not* eat his breakfast.

CHAPTER II.

BARNARD'S INN.

MISS HINDMARSH had a great deal to do. She had to get herself ready before calling on the lawyer in Barnard's Inn, and as getting ready was not so easy as it may appear, that virtuous lady was rather longer about it than some people might think necessary.

The whole of the morning had been spent in preparations; in dressing and in undressing, and in decking herself out in all the odd bits of finery she could pick from her travelling-bag to do honour to her visit, and convince Mr. Blissett that though she had been badly dressed the evening before, she could, if she thought proper, make a sensation, and astonish the Londoners, if not by the newness, yet by the superior cut of her clothes.

At last—dressed to her perfect satisfaction, and all things being ready, Miss Hindmarsh took an early lunch, sent for a hackney coach, and, accompanied by her Captain, was driven to the unknown land of Holborn, and to that part of it where Barnard's Inn stands dimly on one side,

informing the law-loving public where law is to be had, and where lawyers lie in wait to draw people into it.

Jarvey knew his business. He saw by the look of them he had a couple inside who knew as much about London as he knew of the moon, and took them in his charge at once. With a view of showing them what London was like, and how large it was, he drove them first up one street, then down another, dragged them east, west, north, and south, through a labyrinth of ways known only to a Jarvey, and having done his work handsomely, landed them at Barnard's Inn, greatly to the relief of Miss Hindmarsh, who began to think it an uncommonly long way off, and that they should never get there.

They were more than an hour behind time! Mr. Blissett had given them up, and was going out at the moment Jarvey drove up with his fare. But on Miss Hindmarsh assuring him that they had started before one o'clock (it was now past three), and on the Captain stating his belief that she was rather "slow," Mr. Blissett pronounced the whole affair a "do," paid Jarvey his proper fare, told him he must have lost his way, and set the fellow swearing "he'd comed as nigh as he could, and couldn't have comed a nigher if he'd tried."

It was of no use. His money was paid him, and Jarvey had nothing left for it but to grumble—which he did. Said “he’d been blessed if he’d brought ’em at all if he’d knowed how he should be bilked!” then drove off a great deal faster than he came, disgusted to find “as how his insides knew a outside as warn’t to be done, though they was, and would have been done, if the white-headed old chap had only let them.”

The first view of Barnard’s Inn, little as its outside is prepossessing, had an instantaneous effect on the fair Priscilla. To knock at a dentist’s door, and find your pain cease with the knock, is an experience known to most. It could not more speedily relieve the sufferer in one sense, than the sight of the dingy office stairs served to excite a corresponding feeling in the breast of the hopeful spinster in the other. Now tooth-drawing is one thing; making sure of a husband is another! And though both operations may be attended with a happy result, the wrench it gave her to be suddenly relieved of her uncertainty, animated her with an unusual flow of spirits.

Tripping up the stairs, as though that narrow flight had been the steps of a church, and the first-floor office the wished-for altar, she left the Lawyer and the Captain to follow at their leisure. The Lawyer slow, as lawyers always are,

the Captain stiff and cramped from sitting in the coach, rubbing his joints and with difficulty climbing to the top, whence his charmer watched him, and fondly thought, the time had come when she could calculate to a certainty on securing a husband, who, though he was a martyr to rheumatism, had yet a captivating exterior, and was cast, from top to toe, in the true military mould.

As it was necessary to keep up appearances, and be a little flurried, Miss Hindmarsh met the delicacy of her position with a timid, though most studied grace. She ran out one of her curls to its extremest length, twisted it round her finger, then in a pretty twirl, returned it to its place under her bonnet; trifled with her fan, and, for the first time in her life, positively blushed, when Mr. Blissett inquired the purport of her visit, and begged to be informed in what way he could have the happiness to be of service to her.

“You positively must permit me a few moments to recover myself,” said Priscilla, looking as if she really wanted something to recover her, then rather at a loss for words, she stammered and simpered, and appeared uncommonly nervous, as she said—

“Your penetration has no doubt furnished you with a reason for this visit. That is, as regards

the Captain's coming here with me, and the occasion of my journey to London."

Upright as a dart, his whiskers newly brushed, his chest doubly padded, and his little cane smartly tapping the floor, the Captain met his fate with resignation, and defied the worst. Not that he was insensible to the blandishments of his fair one; but just then, he could not help drawing comparisons between the beautiful girl he had held so lately nestling on his breast, patting her head, and fondling her like a favourite child—with the angular demonstration set bolt upright in the chair before him. Her face the colour of a peony, and her everlasting curls tortured to fresher twists, or, lank from over-twisting, no longer capable of being converted into corkscrews.

As Miss Hindmarsh had not come upwards of two hundred miles purposely to show her graces, or be overcome by timidity, she made an effort; controlled a little pardonable emotion, and proceeded to enlighten the lawyer on the object of her visit.

"You will, I hope, my very amiable sir, make some allowance for the strange position in which a lady of my retiring habits is so singularly placed, and strengthen me with your counsel and advice. I may venture to assert, that no

lady ever paid so little attention to thoughts of sublunary bliss as I have. I have rather passed my life in humbleness, and in doing good to my fellow-creatures, than in vanity and dissimulation; of which I am sorry to say, I find the world too full, and the wicked inhabitants of Knaresborough utterly forgetful of the daily lessons of humility and despair, set them by my saintly brother."

"And who," said the lawyer, hemming rather audibly, and making believe he had a fly in his throat, "who might this admirable specimen of humanity be, who took the pains to make his townsfolk miserable, and dissatisfied with the blessing of existence."

"The Reverend Josiah Hindmarsh—a humble but most successful teacher of the Gospel, and an expounder of the truths of virtue and self-denial. He was, I am happy to say, a holder forth against the abomination of the Slave Trade, and as his sister, I am thankful to know, I have done my best to aid him, and prove the justice of his views."

"As far as the Slave Trade is concerned, perhaps. But how about a special instance?" said Mr. Blissett, as he looked half-jestingly, half-pitifully, at the Captain, as much as to say, that a greater slave than he was likely to be, if he married her, it would be difficult to find. "You

do not surely undertake to say, that any man would wish to boast of freedom, when Miss Hindmarsh was willing to condescend to chain him to her side for life?"

"You positively must not say such wicked things, or I shall never be able to proceed. Besides, you know, it is not proper to listen to praises of our own perfections, none of us being perfect, but only worms and fleshly creatures grovelling in our sin."

This rather novel style of illustration completely silenced Mr. Blissett. He gave in at once, and taking it for granted that Miss Hindmarsh only dwelt upon the sinfulness of mankind in order to show off her own superiority to all human weakness, he looked at the saintly damsel with an uneasy glance, turned first to her, then to the Captain, and patiently awaited a fresh outpouring of the spirit.

Finding this slow to come, and perceiving that his client evidently expected that he should relieve her of the awkwardness of the position, and make matters easy, he said—

"But worms, my dear madam, crawl in company; and may be supposed to follow out their instincts in companionship with their kind. Now companionship is what we all go for. It is natural and proper—more especially with man and

woman, and since, as Benedick says, 'the world must be peopled——' ”

“I have not the honour of being acquainted with the gentleman you name, and judging from his language, don't want,” replied the spinster, slightly redder than before, and flustered at the impropriety of the allusion, more particularly as the Captain positively smiled, and did not immediately put a stop to the conversation, as he ought to have done, out of respect to her, and considering the delicacy of the subject.

“You are aware,” resumed Miss Hindmarsh, after a brief, though rather perplexing pause, “that I am indebted to a distant relation for the possession of a small property bequeathed to me by will, as the remaining member of the superior branch of the Hindmarsh family, and therefore selected by that rather eccentric individual to inherit certain freehold houses and funded property, the particulars of which you are acquainted with, and fully understand, from the fact that you acted as her legal adviser, and were selected by me to look after *my* interests, and receive *my* dividends at her demise.”

“The Lord Chief Justice could not put the case more clearly. I hope you are satisfied that everything has been done to your advantage, and

that our correspondence has been of a most agreeable kind."

"Perfectly. You are also aware that this property is mine entirely; that I am free to deal with it as I see fit, and that no relative is interested in it, nor can in anyway interfere with what I feel disposed to do with it, either at my death, or during life."

"Again, I say, most admirably put. And though, perhaps, it might be only reasonable to expect that some members of your family would eventually benefit by your fortune——"

"I do not think it probable. It will depend upon circumstances, and on the affectionate treatment I may receive, or otherwise, at the hands of one who has professed a willingness to join his fate with mine, and exist entirely on my generosity."

There was no getting over this point blank statement. But the Captain never flinched. He rested on his heels, and was prepared to stand or fall with them.

"It is almost needless to tell you after what persuasion I have consented to the sacrifice, and how at the last I have been prevailed upon to accept the offer made me by Captain Nubbleton. As a gentleman, he is faultless; as an officer, his lady will be presentable at Court; and as his wife——"

Here Miss Hindmarsh thought it only proper to be a little overcome, and try if a tear could be squeezed out of the corner of her eye in evidence of the state of her feelings.

Finding this rather difficult, and that tears, spite of her coaxing, wouldn't come, she made as though, by a powerful effort, she had controlled herself and driven back those tell-tale witnesses of her weakness; that unwilling to distress the Captain by the sight of her sensibility, she had gulped them down, and was willing to suffer martyrdom, rather than cause him a moment's uneasiness.

She went on—

“As his wife, I feel I shall have a duty to discharge, and a mission to fulfil. A woman without a mission is a creature without a name! With a mission, what may she not accomplish; what not hope to do for universal charity, and the benefit of lost mankind?”

It was evident to the lawyer, that Miss Hindmarsh was on the point of setting off upon a moral lecture, and once set going, he felt that office hours would be considerably extended, and the half-a-hundred things he had to do, neglected. He therefore wisely stopped her, and turning to the Captain, begged to be informed if the “mission” hinted at by Miss

Hindmarsh met his approbation, and if not, why not ?

“Reciprocating as I do the truth of my dear one’s sentiment,” said the Captain with a turn at his little whiskers, and the bringing up of his cane to the military salute, “it is needless to dwell upon it in words. As a soldier and a gentleman, I honour her ; and as a man, will hold her goodness unexampled in the annals of the world.”

“That is enough. At all events if it ain’t, it ought to be, and that’s as much as the best of us can say,” replied the lawyer, reassured as to the safety of office hours, and that there was a chance of the interview coming to a close.

“The Captain and myself have entered into a little arrangement, which, if you see no objection to it, as a matter of business, may be amicably arranged, and the preliminaries made for our union. I have consented to settle on the Captain (the moment he shall be my husband) my freehold houses. These to revert to me again, should an early death deprive me of him, or, in the case of what you alluded to just now, as said by a gentlemen of your acquaintance, and having reference to children. Should such an interesting event take place, the houses are to go to them ; but otherwise, to be his entirely,

unless indeed, as all flesh is grass, I should be mowed down first, and leave a wicked world unconscious of an infant's smile, and unrewarded by the feelings of a mother."

This announcement, when taken in connection with the personal appearance of Miss Hindmarsh, proved too much for Mr. Blissett. He was so little given to the quizzical, that a lady under ordinary circumstances, might have indulged in fanciful commendations on herself, or talked incessantly of matters peculiar to her vanity, without exciting his attention one way or the other. But when Miss Hindmarsh, bronzed and brown and angular; aged fifty-three, and unpleasantly suggestive of a representation of Britannia painted on a sign-board, talked of the possibility of her matronly claims upon society, and of the Captain, by whom such a likelihood was to be brought about—he lost command over his features, gave himself up to the spirit of enjoyment, and wickedly inclined to make the spinster yet more demonstrative than she had been, was in the act of following up her children, and making free with her as a mother, when the Captain, by a remarkably dignified look, and an attitude denoting the quarrelsome, recalled him to himself.

"There is no possible impediment to prevent a settlement such as you mention, that I am

aware of," said Mr. Blissett. "I will, however, look over the will under which you take, and write you necessary particulars. If that disclose no objection, I will have the deed prepared, and the draft sent for your approval. Then, as you wisely say, you can sign your consent on the wedding morning, and Captain Nubbleton obtain possession, not only of a wife, but of a portion of her property. One thing, however, I think it right to mention, which is, that it is a little contrary to custom to endow a husband with a wife's property, or enrich him at her expense. But since it must be so, and as the members of your family—"

"The 'members of my family,'" said Miss Hindmarsh, with an asperity little in keeping with her professed humility, "are nothing to me. They have forfeited all claims on my consideration by their disobedience to my wishes, and I see no reason why I should sacrifice my own desires to gratify people who will insist on marrying preposterously early, and with such little or no regard to the religious scruples of the superior portion of the family. First Mates of Slavers, and Ensigns without means, not being in accordance with propriety, nor fit to mingle in a circle which boasts Josiah Hindmarsh for its head, and ain't ashamed to say so."

As Mates and Ensigns were beyond his comprehension, and as he did not wish to be favoured with the spinster's views upon the Army and Navy, Mr. Blissett left them to their fate, and silently commiserated the Captain upon his.

He had taken a fancy to that little starched-up gentleman, and would gladly have seen him relieved from the mishaps awaiting him, should it so fall out, he and his amiable client, really entered the holy bonds of matrimony, and for better or worse, took the earliest opportunity to fall at loggerheads, and lead a cat-and-dog life of it for the rest of their lives.

If such must be the case, he prayed at least that the Captain might remain in peaceable possession, or have a short lease, and so an end of all.

The interview was over. Miss Hindmarsh had made an end of her business, and there was little else to do but to say good-bye; wish her a safe journey back, and promise to give his best attention to the matter he had in hand.

Glad to get rid of her so easily, Mr. Blissett politely handed her down the stairs, and leaving her in charge of her trusty knight, congratulated himself he had got rid of the pair of them, when his son most provokingly came up to the door, and on seeing the Captain, wanted to drag

him into the house again, as he stood flourishing his cane, and clicking his heels, while his sharp high voice rang through the inn like a muffin bell.

As this would never do, Mr. Blissett was on the point of bowing the Captain and his charmer out, when lumbering up the court a man in a Glengarry cap, and drab great-coat, came slouching on, burring and humming like a dorr-beetle, and staring in at the doorways, as if looking for some name he wanted to find. .

To his surprise Mr. Blissett observed him halt opposite his own office door, then, at the sight of the Captain and his fair one, stare and look, salute them by a grin—bob at them with his Glengarry cap, and familiarly make known his presence by saying—

“ Weel, if this ain’t rum ! Beats cockfighting anyhoo—an’ Newcas’le to a guinea-pig, is out-an’ out, the queerest thing I’ve seen this many a day. Oh ! its no use your looking grand an’ great,” said he, seeing the Captain sniff as if to inhale an atmosphere above him, and snuff him out by his supreme disdain. “ It’s no use opening your eyes in that way, an’ pretending not to know me. It’s not asleep ye are just the noo, though you war at the upset ; an’ this gude leddy kens me too ; an’ by the looks of her is no so

downright crazy as she war when I sec her at the bottom of the coach crunching my bonnet, an' crampling it under her hocks as if it had been a dishclout."

"Man!" cried Priscilla, horrified by the familiarity of his address, and scandalized at the notion that any part of her person should be compared to hocks.

"Weel, ma'am, if you come to that—oh, it's no gude stretching your hed out o' your body in that way, nor for you to cock up your nose—(this to the Captain) as though you had a chance of reaching to my shoulder. Nor it's no use either on you twisting your eyes in your heds, an' looking spruce an' grand, like bubbly-jocks! It's no so grand you were, nor half so fine, at Newark, when your chap here rid outside the sha, an' you slept double wi' the chambermaid, till Poll Woodruff bundled her out, an' left you almost daft wi' thinking the Captain might come an' catch you in your curl crackers."

"Poll who?" said Mr. Blissett, staring at the new-comer, and to all appearances as much confounded at the sight of the north countryman as was the Captain, or his interesting client.

"Poll Woodruff as war—Poll Savaker as is; an' landlady of the Cas'le at Newark, where her late husband may be seen ony day for saxpence."

"If, sir," shouted the Captain, "she were mistress of a dozen Castles, and you backed in your insolence by a thousand innkeepers, this effrontery, and the liberty you have taken with this lady, should not go unpunished. Sir, you are no gentleman. Sir, you are a blackguard, and as a soldier, I call upon you to make an apology, or consider yourself horsewhipped."

"As to my being a gentleman, it's what I mack no brag about; an' as to the horsewhipping I'll tack that upon trust, an' consider onything you please. Only don't try it on, do you see, in earnest, or ma be you'll find your wee bit cane broken about your hed, an' your grand leddy there worse off than she war at the scrimmage on the road."

But, as, utterly regardless of this threat, the Captain appeared determined on proceeding to extremities, young Blissett had to get between them and keep the peace, while his father beckoned the Northumbrian, and leading the way upstairs, took him into his private room, leaving his son to look after the Captain and his charmer, to put them in a cab, and see them driven off faster than they came.

CHAPTER III.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD.

THE time for Margaret's marriage to take place had arrived. The time had come for her to keep her word, or draw on herself the censure of the world by breaking it ; merit Ellerton's contempt for her utter heartlessness towards him, and justify her mother's indignation at the persevering indifference which, according to her account, she at all times exhibited, not only to her own advancement, but to the good of her family.

The intimacy with the Blissett family meanwhile had assumed the more agreeable form of friendship. Mutual meetings had been arranged, and mutual regards exchanged ; until the members of the two families grew almost inseparable, and Mr. Leonard Blissett was regarded in the light of Miss Bertha Rushbrook's accepted lover. She had carried out her notion with respect to age in selecting her admirer, and though her own age was, as her mother said, preposterously young for her to be engaged, Bertha took the liberty to disagree with her—expressed her horror at the

disparity of ages existing between Margaret and her future husband, and, though she kept her sentiments to herself, did not by her manner evidence too great a partiality for him personally. A shyness existed, brought about perhaps by the mutual dislike between that gentleman and young Leonard Blissett, though how or why neither could determine, further than to say that so it was, and to acknowledge that the more frequently they met, the less they seemed inclined to tolerate each other.

Mrs. Rushbrook saw all this, but knew that by talking of it she should only make matters worse, and confirm Mark Ellerton in his obstinacy and dislike. To argue with him would be folly. He was old enough to form his own opinions, and any interference on her part, she felt, would but excite his suspicion, and lead him to imagine that she had some secret reason for her preference, and that by taking part with Leonard Blissett, she wished him to suppose she was personally antagonistic to him.

She was far too selfish (without quite meaning it) to desire this, or to do anything to annoy him. Let him only have his way, do just what he pleased, and that strange imperious man was gentle as a lamb. Thwart him and he would prove a tiger! She had read his character too

closely not to discover this, and therefore left the enmity existing between himself and Leonard Blissett to die a natural death, or gradually to manifest itself in a more marked manner than it had hitherto done.

Her aunt and the Captain had gone home. The same long stage-coach which brought them had taken them back, and Mrs. Rushbrook hoped to entertain a lasting recollection of her relative's excessive kindness to herself and daughters. She was so grateful for the lessons she had been favoured with respecting her own conduct, and the way in which she brought up her family, that she sincerely hoped she might never see her face again, nor have the mortification to behold her stuck-up little husband, who was to rob her and her family of any hope of succeeding to her aunt's property.

But they were gone. They had been gone some time, and though she had been honoured by frequent communications from her aunt, and had answered her in an equally complimentary strain, she grew tired at last of her repeated encomiums on herself, and the praises showered on the Captain. Praises so distasteful to her, she heartily wished that some equally forsworn spinster with her aunt might snap him up, and do away with her preposterous laudation of the smallest

specimen of mankind it had ever been her misfortune to behold.

Whether he had been snapped up or had proved unfaithful she could not quite determine ; though to judge by her aunt's more recent letters, something had happened to temper her absurdity, and make her a little less ridiculous than she had been. She was melancholy now, where she had before been buoyant, desponding where she had been overjoyed, and so full of moral reflections on the uncertainty of mundane happiness, that Mrs. Rushbrook could not help thinking that something serious had happened to the Captain ; that either a big boy had thrashed him for his insolence, or that he had run away and left her dearly beloved aunt to mourn his loss.

Let him be thrashed ! Let Priscilla break her heart, and talk as much as she pleased of the necessity of enduring with meekness and resignation the disappointments to which this life is liable—Mrs. Rushbrook did not mean to be disappointed. She was quite prepared to accept the goods of this life as they were, and do her best to make the most of them despite of her aunt and her consequential beau. Her daughter's marriage was almost immediately to take place ; the moment it was over, and she could with certainty say she had secured to herself one of the

richest sons-in-law in England, she felt she should have a splendid opportunity to retaliate on her aunt by sending her a glowing account of the marriage, and set her beside herself with thinking of her disappointment ; if, as Mrs. Rushbrook fancied, she had really quarrelled with the Captain, and that their engagement was broken off.

Margaret meanwhile prepared to meet her fate. She was free from anger now, and free from pride. She knew that hope was gone, and that Frederick was gone as well. In losing him she had lost her care of everything, and would have been satisfied, could she have only known what had really happened, and the truth or falsehood of the charges which had caused their separation.

Ill, she knew he had been. But that was not all. There was inconstancy to be explained, and the charges her great-aunt had brought against him to be set at rest. It did not matter whether they were true or false, at least she thought not, yet she had longed to be informed of all, and to know for certain what had taken place, so that in the time to come her mind might be at ease, and no self-reproach come to tax her with inconstancy.

She felt she would have given all the world to have had one hour's conversation with him, even

while she trembled at the thought, and in her wretchedness, scarcely dared to contemplate the possibility of such a blessing, lest Frederick should be able to prove his innocence, and destroy the only thing she had to cling to in her despair—that he had first deserted her.

Oh! had he loved her with a tithe of the devotion she had shown to him; had he but valued her as she had valued him; the knowledge of her present misery would renew his health, and nerve his limbs with strength; enable him to rush up to her rescue, break through all impediments, and even at the altar lay claim to her, carry her away, and never leave her to be wretched, while life and hope still hung together, or a chance was left to repossess her. The Captain! Had he been true to her? Had he informed his pupil, or had he, so fully trusted, neglected to inform her of what had happened? forgotten all about her, or, talked over by her great-aunt, had he neglected to fulfil his promise, and tell him of her true position.

Yet in the midst of all her misery, she could not help fancying that her correspondence had been intercepted, and that the Captain's letters had been purposely kept back. She had fancied this on more than one occasion, for though letters often came, she never knew who from, nor

what about, but by her mother's studied silence, and the pains she took to keep her in ignorance of everything that passed, she became suspicious, and could not help imagining she was the victim of some artifice.

But when the same thing occurred again, when fresh letters came, and her mother was still silent, she became doubly anxious and suspicious, and determined on the next occasion to be ready to receive them; to know for certain if any letters came for her, and if so, to keep her correspondence to herself.

But that time never came! No news, and not a word from either! Nothing but Ellerton! Ellerton for ever there, day by day, and night by night, looking at her with his large dark eyes, and paying court to her, while she was well-nigh distracted! And then to hear his footstep pass and die away, and the tramp of Angus follow after, as doglike and obedient to his wish he still kept close, and never left him—until beaten, driven, and treated like a slave, he might turn upon him at the last perhaps, and in a fit of madness tear him to pieces.

Loving Frederick ten thousand times more than she had ever loved him in her life before, she felt her soul rebel at him who had torn her from his arms; fell into fits of passionate weep-

ing, and loathing, hating Ellerton, wished he had been swallowed in the sea before he had come to buy her with his presents, and charm her mother by his riches.

One only treasure she would keep—priceless to her, although of little worth to others. That same small rim of gold edging her lover's portrait! That poor despised portrait was worth the universe to her, and nothing that Ellerton could ever do should lessen her regard to it, or make her shift it from its place to make room for him! Next to her heart it lay, and where no other one could ever hope to rest! He knew its secret meaning, its troubled workings, and its fluttering hopes. He only could excite its throb, allay its fear, and, like a talisman, call forth its beating, or lull it to repose.

There was no room for any one but him. Certainly not for Ellerton, and if she must be married to him, she determined never to wear his fatal jewels, but to keep them locked and fastened up; to look at them occasionally, and preserve them, as a philosopher preserves a dead man's bones, to teach him what himself must come to, and speculate upon the useless vanity which first induced her to be attracted by them.

Her punishment would thus be always present to her, the purchase of her heart be duly reckoned,

and Frederick be revenged with every stealthy glance she stole at them. And when at last she slowly wore away ; when her beauty and her charms had faded, and she lay dead and wasted in her coffin—then let them dress her in them if they pleased ; deck her poor body with them, and with their fatal dowry, see her go deep into her grave ; there to cast them off again, and, once more free, mount up to Heaven, and find her lover in the world to come.

The day arrived. Margaret was married. Ellerton had gained his bride. The contract had been fulfilled, and as the carriage drove away, a pale sad face looked from it and gazed its last upon her mother's home. The greeting hands are held forth, the fluttering handkerchiefs wave a last adieu, and Margaret is gone ! Gone with her husband to test the soundness of her mother's speculations, and prove how far his riches and his wealth could make amends for poverty : console her for the loss of one who had to work his way up in the world ; and prove the superiority of her present husband to the one she had hoped to have chosen for herself.

The carriage had no sooner driven off, and the small knot of sightseers dispersed, than a second carriage dashing down the street drew

up at the door. The windows lately filled with smiling faces, and with hands waving adieus to Margaret, were vacant now : but at the sound of wheels, a woman's face peeped over the blind, at the very moment that a young man leaped from the carriage, and running up the steps, knocked hurriedly at the door.

Watching behind the curtain, and observing him where he stood, she saw his pale face and trembling limbs, then turned away and left him gasping there ; and with a hurried whisper in the passage, prepared him to expect the worst.

The door was opened. He had come too late ! Margaret was already married. Staggering down the steps again he threw himself into the carriage and was driven off without saying a word. But as he left the door, the same face peeped over the blind again—a little paler perhaps, and with a touch of pity on it as it saw the young man's dejected look and staggering gait—then it turned away, and all was silent as before.

CHAPTER IV.

A PEEP INTO THE PAST.

WITHIN a short distance of the town of Knaresborough, pleasantly situated, and on a gentle eminence, stood a comfortable but by no means extensive building, the residence of Mr. Arkwright; and here, unknown to Margaret, her lover had been confined to his bed for the last several weeks by a dangerous fit of illness.

Frederick's illness had been a lingering one. Fever had succeeded fever, and relapse relapse, until his doctor almost despaired of his life, while his parents, hoping with the least change for the better, and watching night and day, never left his bedside until they saw a marked improvement in him, and began to trust that, blessed with a good constitution, he might ultimately recover.

He got better after a time, that was one comfort, and though far from well, he was so much better that the doctor spoke confidently of his being soon restored to health, if he could only get into the air and pick up an appetite.

His first attempt at walking proved a sad affair. He could hardly stand or drag one leg after the

other ; but by degrees he managed to get about a little, walked with a stick, or sat in an arbour in the garden, where, in company with his friend and tutor, he did his best to obey the doctor's orders, and live in the air as much as possible.

One drawback to his getting better was his constant desire to talk of Margaret ; and, wondering what could be the reason that her mother never wrote according to promise, he grew so restless and impatient, that the Captain had much ado in restraining his anxiety and putting him off, thinking to prepare him little by little, and gradually break the news of his mistress's unfaithfulness and engagement to another.

But what was the Captain to do ? and how on earth should he tell him, when the least allusion to Margaret set him in a ferment, and unhinged him for the remainder of the day ? He did not dare to be precipitate, for fear of the consequences, and dreading the effect the news might have on his beloved pupil, he made a thousand efforts, but as frequently put off the information he desired to impart, lest it should bring on another relapse, and retard his recovery.

He had heard some time before of the sudden change in Margaret's affections, but not quite trusting to all Miss Hindmarsh told him, he had tried to think lightly of it, though he fretted at

the news, and did not dare to tell his pupil, for at that time he was in so doubtful a state, the least shock might have endangered his life.

He had seen Margaret since, and knew exactly how she was situated. He had seen and talked with her, and, sensitive to a fault, reflected on her unhappiness more than was good for him. He could not eat; he could not drink; but walked as if in a cloud, and, repeating as far as he could remember what she had said to him, drew in his mind the picture of her despair so vividly, he could think and dream of nothing else.

But as a man of honour he was bound to keep his word. He had promised to explain to his pupil the reason of their separation, and beg him to forgive her for suspecting him so unjustly. He had promised and must perform! and though he would rather have had his arm taken off than tell his friend, he had no help for it. Do it he must, or sacrifice his right to be considered an officer and a gentleman.

Yet how was he to set about it at a time when Frederiek was only slowly recovering, and might be sent back to his bed at the least shock given to his nervous system? No! he would watch and wait; stay till he got a little better, but in the meantime pretended to be full of spirits, sparkling and gay, when all the while his heart

was heavy as lead, and his eyes were half full of tears.

At last, having waited as he thought long enough, and given hints—which only made matters worse—he took “the bull by the horns” one day, as he said, made a clean breast of it, and told Frederick everything that Margaret had mentioned to him during the interview she had had with him at the coffee-house.

Stunned at the first, and unable to realize the extent of his wretchedness, Frederick did not exhibit the signs of emotion his friend expected, but as he became violently agitated afterwards, the poor Captain was in a worse situation than ever, so that, what between his regard for Margaret, and love for his pupil, he stood trembling and sobbing, and unable to say a word.

But as all violent paroxysms are the soonest over, and as “the worst returns to better,” the excitement was not of long duration. Frederick became quiet and subdued, the Captain gulped his tears, and after a mutual change of sympathy and regrets, they agreed to meet next day, and talk over their woes in secret.

It was with this friendly intention the Captain paid his promised visit ; and speaking encouragingly to his pupil, prepared to take him for his usual walk in the garden, or sit with him in the

arbour, where they had been in the habit of sitting and talking since the Captain's return from London.

Leading him with the utmost tenderness, and at times supporting him, the Captain conducted him to a seat, and taking a place beside him, renewed the conversation at the point where it had been left off the previous day.

Free from intrusion, pleased with the shade, and anxious to be informed of anything the Captain had to say, his unhappy pupil sat, and looking up reliantly in his face, waited for him to begin and talk of what he knew would only add to his distress.

"You are, I hope, by this time satisfied," said the Captain, holding his pupil's thin white hand in both his own, "how entirely innocent that dear girl is of all blame in this unfortunate affair. She is to be pitied, not condemned; and as I know how terribly she has suffered, you will, I am sure, do everything in your power to think of her as kindly as she deserves, and cherish her recollection with the utmost tenderness."

"Oh! yes—yes—yes," said Frederiek, gasping between his sobs. "She is, I know, innocent of all intention to deceive. It is I who have been to blame—I who have been the unfortunate cause of all this misery."

“No man can be said to be the cause of what he cannot help,” replied the methodical Captain. “And as no man can control the will of God, you cannot possibly be answerable for what He in His wisdom was pleased to afflict you with! You did not willingly afflict yourself with illness, my dear young friend; and if the Almighty called on you to suffer, let us hope it was for some wise purpose of His own, and that your suffering was meant to teach you resignation, and to bear with meekness one of the conditions incumbent upon our poor weak human nature.”

“But sickness is not a necessary condition. It is rather to be reckoned as an affliction happening to the few than to the many. How many thousands live to a good old age and never know the months of suffering I have endured in this last fatal sickness?”

“And thousands die! or struck with sudden death are in a moment summoned to their account! Thousands again limp on, or, cripples from their youth, watch how the strong and healthy strut about, and scarcely look upon their halting fellow. Yet *he*, perhaps, may last the longer, and after all have reason to rejoice that his afflictions, as they seemed to be, were but to be reckoned as a set-off against a longer life.”

“You, then, would wish to show——”

“ We are in the hands of God, my friend. He rules. He governs, and, like good Christians, we must submit to His decree ! Or, if you wish an illustration, I would say (and without speaking profanely) that we are bound to act on our superior’s orders, and, like good soldiers, must not question, but obey ; and taking it for granted that a wiser than ourselves directs an operation, we cheerfully fall in with His tactics and His plans. Were we all generals there would be no subordination. We should be all for doing what pleased ourselves, and a pretty mess we should make of a campaign.”

“ And yet this sickness has been attended with such sad results—has led to so much misery, and been the cause of so much suffering, that cheerfully as I accept the will of Heaven, and submit with patience to what is given for our good, I cannot but regret the pain it has caused to others. I feel it on her account more than on my own, and feel it doubly when I think how easily that suffering might have been avoided had my brother given me the letter she wrote to me.”

He could proceed no further. The thought of what had been written in that letter, and the earnestness with which she had entreated him to write to her in reply, completely overpowered him. He knew, when it was too late to remedy

the defect, that his silence had offended Margaret, and that his presumed indifference had influenced her conduct in relation to the engagement of which the Captain had informed him. This reflection proving too much for him, his strength gave way, and, leaning on his friend's shoulder, his agony found vent in sobs, and in repressed, though starting tears.

“Your brother did a brother's part, and, with your mother's and your father's sanction, prudently kept back all correspondence! Of what use would it have been to distract you at a time like that? You were light-headed enough in all conscience without having a fresh excitement to make you downright crazy. Therefore I say again your brother did a proper thing, so do not blame him for what was intended for your good.”

“Had they but hinted,” Frederick hurriedly resumed, and as if unconscious of an interruption. “Had they but told me she had written, I should have been relieved of all the doubting and despair which at that time distracted me. Instead of which, they cruelly kept back the only thing that would have comforted and satisfied me—that she, at least, had not forgotten me. The knowledge of her constancy and the assurance of her love would have enabled me to counteract the schemes by which her family hoped to sepa-

rate us and meet them upon equal grounds. I had promised her mother not to correspond with Margaret. I kept my word, but she broke hers. She undertook to write to me. She did not. Thus day by day expecting, and day by day as constantly disappointed, the agony and suspense I suffered first brought on my fever, and, I verily believe, laid me on that bed of sickness from which I rise at last to find how shamefully I have been treated, and how infamously wronged. Oh, Captain, Captain! had you ever loved as I have loved, you would speak less coldly. You would understand my misery, and be less inclined to applaud a prudence which has destroyed the peace of my whole life."

"My dear, good pupil, I positively must lay my injunction on you to be calm, or I shall say good-bye and leave you to the charge of a more rigid nurse. I thought to soothe and comfort you—not to excite you by dwelling on the past."

"Had this excitement come earlier," said Frederick; "had this fever of the mind been let to have its way some months ago, it might have driven out the other one, and, like fire opposed to fire, effectually have consumed the cause of both. It is the only peace I have—the only strength I have; and, strange as it may sound, I feel myself fifty times better from a sudden

burst of feeling than by brooding on my wrongs and groaning over them. I feel I should go mad if I could not speak of what I suffer, or, if compelled to hold my tongue, grow downright frantic."

"There, there ; we'll let those matters be and talk of something else. You are aware how deeply I feel for you, and will not, therefore, suppose me capable of a want of consideration to your sufferings, when I state what I conceive to be for your good, and beg of you to learn to practise. Patience, my friend—patience, and in a little time perhaps——"

"Yes, when that 'little time' of yours sends me with a bullet to my grave, and effectually puts an end to all my woes. But not till then !—not till a bullet or a sword has done its work shall I think differently, or endure with patience this most cruel wrong ! But it is not too late. I have written to Margaret, and the moment I can regain strength to go to London we'll soon see who is to succeed, and whether her mother's selfish policy or my faithful love shall get the better in the end."

"Written to Margaret !"

"Did not you tell me of her misery, and speak of her bright face as sad and pale and sorrowful, and shall I not endeavour to make it

smile again, and set her free? Can I not challenge this tall, sallow (and as you say cold-blooded fellow) who, by meanly stooping to purchase what he could not win, perhaps worked on her feelings to accept him for reasons you and I may guess at, though we do not know for certain."

"As to a challenge," said the Captain, drawing himself up, "that has been already suggested. It would have afforded me the greatest satisfaction to have winged that six-foot piece of ill-mannered consequence, had I only had the luck to hit him—as I think I should have had. Or granted he hit me, it would have been a consolation for me to know that I died for her, my friend, and you; and that by snuffing out poor Conroy Nubbleton, that beetle-browed slave-driver had made himself amenable to the laws, which by a summary process, might have deprived him of the ability to make that angelic creature more wretched than she is already."

Without the slightest bombast in his tone or manner, the Captain expressed himself firmly, but with the greatest possible placidity. He appeared to have grown a little taller on the sudden, and increased in size, though his eyes were blinking, and the tears standing in them; but beyond that the Captain was unruffled, and said no more than he would have performed.

Frederick tried to thank him, but he could not; his heart was too full for words; all he could do was to press his hand, and silently assure him that his friendship and good feeling were appreciated, and thankfully acknowledged.

“A worn-out soldier, my dear boy,” resumed the Captain, returning the pressure of his friend’s hand, and after a moments pause, “might have a worse end. Having escaped so many, it might be considered a proper thing that I should be knocked over by a bullet at last, if only to make amends for previous disappointments. A better end, as I said before, than patching up my fortunes by marriage, or by——”

But here a sense of what was due to Miss Hindmarsh, if not to himself, prevented him from finishing the sentence, and cast a shade over his countenance, notwithstanding his endeavour to appear indifferent.

“There,” cried Frederick, impatiently, “is the stumbling-block over which poor Margaret and I have fallen. To that lady’s meddling (for I presume you allude to Miss Hindmarsh) we are principally indebted for what has taken place. Had she not interfered and set the mother against me, nothing of this sort would have occurred; for all went well enough until she stepped between, and took upon herself to spread

dissension when there was no cause for it. Now as this lady——”

“*Was* to have been Mrs. Captain Nubbleton——”

“Was?”

“But is not. I need scarcely remind you, that a lady so delicately positioned——”

“Forgive me. But Miss Hindmarsh was never too good a friend of mine, and as Margaret’s mother is her niece, it is not unreasonable to suppose she set her against me by some tale or other, manufactured for the occasion.”

“Mrs. Rushbrook acted on her own responsibility, and Miss Hindmarsh, I assure you, is entirely blameless in the affair. I must therefore beg of you to speak of her with respect, and not associate her name with others who have to answer for what has taken place.”

The Captain’s gallantry and his love of truth met opposite ways, and for a time had a hard fight of it. But his manhood triumphed, and though at that particular moment he entertained the reverse of a burning passion for the lady in question, he felt himself bound to stand up in her cause, and defend her against all comers.

“At all events,” said Frederick, seeing the Captain look rather grandly, “you will not deny that some under-current has been at work, or

some influence brought to bear upon this poor girl's sensibility, enabling her mother to carry out her designs, and force her to accept a husband of her own choosing, without taking into consideration the misery her daughter might suffer in giving me up, or what I might endure in losing her."

"So far, I think you may be right, and, from what that dear angelic girl said to me, I think you are. It is a money-making world, my friend, and mothers (much as we may condemn Mrs. Rushbrook in this particular instance) are right in the long run, and a rich marriage after all not so abominable as at first sight it appears to be, where there are daughters to be got rid of."

"But this marriage shall not take place, nor shall Margaret bind herself at the altar to that man. She shall never have to rue through any innocent fault of mine a union brought about by fraud and artifice, nor pine in secret, and in her inmost heart abjure her marriage vow sworn to a husband she must hate and despise! And never while I have strength to snatch her from him, shall she be bound to one so utterly repugnant to her as he must be. In another week I hope to regain sufficient strength to undertake the journey, then let them see what I mean to do, or prevent my seeing her, if they can."

A week, alas! His strength already failed him. Excitement had proved too much for him, and the consequence was that, in the midst of his talk of what he meant to do the moment he got better, he was seized with sudden faintness, and so completely prostrated, that the Captain could with difficulty prevent his falling.

Alarmed for his friend's safety, and at a loss to know what to do, the Captain called and shouted, and summoned his father and mother to assist to carry him indoors and place him on the sofa, notwithstanding his assurance that he was quite well, but did not just then feel so strong as he could wish.

From the sofa he was carried to his bed. His fever had returned, and, during the relapse that followed, the most serious fears were entertained that he might never recover from the fresh attack.

But the Captain never lost heart. He relieved guard, as he called it, and took his share of nursing; waited on him with the affection of a woman, and never left him till it pleased God to restore him to health.

That good time came at last, but not so soon as he expected.

CHAPTER V.

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS.

MRS. RUSHBROOK's surmise had proved correct. Her aunt *had* quarrelled with the Captain; the match had been broken off, and poor Priseilla's troubles seemed to be without end.

It happened through no fault of her own, but through the stupid old woman who had left her the money, and who had so willed it that she could not dispose of a single penny, or make a settlement on her Captain as she wished.

She had been home rather more than a week, and scarcely recovered the shock she had experienced on discovering the Captain's partiality for brandy-and-water, to say nothing of his general treatment of her during their stay in London—when a letter came from Mr. Blissett explaining her position and pointing out the clause in the will preventing her doing as she proposed.

Rolled up in the clause of that hateful will, she felt her Captain as good as gone, and that all her hope of bliss was at an end! She knew he would accept her on no other terms, and what

to do she could not tell. Whether to endure her disappointment like a Christian, or make a dash into the depravities of the town, and startle the whole of Knaresborough by a change from good to bad, by way of convincing her neighbours that, though she had been reserved hitherto, she could, if she had a mind, be quite as much sought after as other people, if she only thought proper to forget the proprieties of life, and neglect the sanctity she had hitherto professed.

Here now was an opportunity for her Captain to prove his magnanimity, and show a superiority to personal advantage by taking her without a shilling. Not that she expected he would ; and he did not. No sooner had she informed him of that hateful clause than he immediately took the opportunity to inform her (though at the same time with the utmost delicacy) that as the terms of capitulation had not been fulfilled, and as the subsidy agreed upon was not forthcoming, he must decline to entertain the notion of a surrender. But before taking his leave, he released her from her engagement, and left her at liberty to marry, as he said, some one else, who would, no doubt, prove infinitely his superior, and more deserving of the honour of her hand than he could ever hope to be.

She begged, entreated, all to no use ! He

would not stay. She had even thought of falling flat upon the floor, and of pretending to be in a swoon, but the thought of the figure she should make, and of Sally being called up to burn feathers under her nose, or slap a wet towel on her face, prevented her. Remedies she had prescribed for Margaret under similar circumstances, but which she knew would prove ineffectual with her, unless the Captain stayed and took part in the reviving process.

But no ! The Captain had beaten a retreat ; he had backed out of the ditch only at the last extremity, and nothing that Priscilla could say or do would tempt him to venture to attack her dilapidated but still formidable works again. There was nothing to be got by it ! No fame, no honour, no loot, no spoil, and so he let her be ! Left her to sigh her heart out, and call to him in vain, for fear she might overcome his resolution, and put him in the ditch again.

There was no getting him to look towards her now, though he passed her window daily, as she knew, for she was always at it. Even the currant wine was slighted, home-made cake forgotten, and the blandishments Priscilla used to coax him with despised ! Nothing could be done with him, and utterly disconsolate, she saw him pass and pass, go by with a dejected air, yet take no

more notice of her than if she had been a pauper, and not a lady of property, and of some consequence in the town.

What could be the matter with him? He had fallen away to nothing. He had never been very fat, but now, Heaven help the man! he was a mere thread-paper! His little chest had shrunk, his legs dwindled, his cane had ceased to flourish, and his heels to clatter, while his whiskers—those trimly-brushed and high-combed whiskers—fell like bits of tow upon his cheeks, and looked so distressingly limp, that Priscilla was in despair, and at last began to think that his butcher had stopped his credit, or that some good-for-nothing hussey had entrapped him to fall in love with her and slight her for her sake; so that at last she determined to watch where he went, and get at his secret by some means or other, let what would come of it.

She had been some time thinking about it, and when a few days after the Captain passed, as usual, without noticing her, she resolved to put her design into execution, and slipping out after him, followed him up one street, down another, and never lost sight of him until she watched him go into Mr. Arkwright's house, and afterwards into the garden, with Frederick leaning on his arm.

Here was a capital opportunity of listening,

if she could only get near enough to hear what they said. Satisfied it was not a woman he went to see, but only that disreputable young man, whose illness she had heard about, but in whom, with all a woman's obstinacy, she had resolved for ever and a day to put no faith, she placed herself close to a hole in the paling, and holding her ear to it, hoped to hear all the Captain and his friend said, without being seen.

However innocent her motive, and however praiseworthy her desire to benefit by the hole in the paling, an unforeseen event frustrated her intentions, and nipt her curiosity in the bud. Just as she had got her ear conveniently placed, and had made up her mind to hear a full and true account of something highly interesting, a wretched little terrier ran out of the house, and making for the fence behind which she was concealed, began barking and snarling most terrifically, then running back into the arbour, barked and pulled, first at his master, then at the Captain, as if to tell them to come and see what it had found, so that she was forced to run away and leave her curiosity unsatisfied.

Disappointed in her expectations, and at a loss to understand how any man in his senses could think it worth his while to make her so miserable, Priscilla determined to spite the world

for his sake, and shut herself up for the remainder of her life—a resolution she carried into effect for quite two months, when, finding the world got on just as well without as with her, she came out again, seized with a new idea and fully prepared to put it in force.

The time appointed for Margaret's wedding to take place had arrived, and as her niece had promised to write and tell her all about it, she had some hopes that by a little management she could contrive to coax her Captain in, if only to hear the letter, and be informed how Margaret had behaved herself upon that interesting occasion. There would be nothing improper in that, and as it would be a good excuse for getting to talk to him, she made up her mind to try, and take her chance of winning him back again if she could.

No sooner had that letter arrived; after she had read it and had had a good cry over it—upon that very morning, when she had lost sight of him for more than a week, and began to think that he went round another way on purpose to avoid her—she saw her faithless Captain pass! Beheld her Nubbleton! his head erect, his whiskers brushed to the top of his cheek-bones, and his heels clinking louder than ever, as if on purpose to make game of her.

. Determined to speak to him, and make hay while the sun shone, she leant out of the window and called—

“Captain ! Captain Nubbleton ! Here is something you must positively be made acquainted with. It is a matter deeply interesting to you, and as a soldier and a gentleman, I must beg of you to step in and listen to the news.”

Called upon as a soldier and a gentleman to stay and listen, the inconstant Captain came to a dead halt, turned his favourite ear towards her, and thus prepared, he stood ready to hear that syren voice explain the reason of her unexpected summons.

“ Captain ! Captain Nubbleton ! ” she called again ; “ you really must come in. Here is a letter full of Margaret’s marriage, and as I thought you would like to hear all about the ceremony, I took the liberty of calling to you so that you might know of it.”

Startled by the news, and aware of the effect it would have upon his friend, the Captain advanced a few paces into the garden, then hung back, turned suddenly about, and bowing with a stately grandeur, walked out again, and left Miss Hindmarsh staring after him till he was out of sight, when, bursting into tears and slamming the window down, she called herself

a wretched woman, and the Captain a heartless monster.

The weather had been very wet for two whole days ; and for two whole days the Captain had been confined to barracks (as he called his little back bed-room), and afraid to go to inquire after his pupil lest he should have an attack of rheumatism. But now, when he was on his way to him, and had made up his mind to cheer him up a little, he was informed of something he knew would break his heart, and convince him that his hopes were vain.

But when he reached the house, he found to his surprise that Frederick had gone to London—gone the very day the rain set in, and the first of those two days, of all the days in the year, when he had made a point of staying at home.

His mother's brother, his uncle Richard, was dangerously ill, and as it was feared there were little hopes of his recovery, a letter had been sent to acquaint them of his condition. Now an India House director could not be suffered to die like an India House porter, and as the Colonel had no one else to leave his money to, it was only natural to suppose that some member of the family should go to London and see him while there was yet time.

But as Mr. Arkwright was confined to his

bed by a fit of gout, and as Mr. Ernest was away, Frederiek professed his willingness to start at once, and said he never felt better in his life—though his appearance was sadly against him—so that his father and mother thought it might be as well if he made the attempt, as it was evident that the Colonel was very ill, and might die and leave his money to a parcel of interested people who were sure to get about him, unless some one went to look after him, and keep a sharp look-out on what was going forward.

Frederick was gone; the Captain held his peace, but thought perhaps the more, when he reflected that he would find his dear one married to another;—learn for the first time that Margaret had been torn from him for ever, and at the very moment he hoped to claim her for his own.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN HOME.

THE excitement occasioned by Margaret's marriage had passed away; the bridesmaids had left off sleeping with pieces of the wedding-cake under their pillows, neighbours had ceased to talk of the rich husband and his fortunate bride; the crossing-sweeper (who had done the honours of the doorstep and thrown the satin slipper after the carriage) had spent his morning's gains; the pale-faced youth who had been seen to stagger down the steps and then drive off—even he had been forgotten, and the street became once more quiet. Windows were cleaned, and the door-steps whitened as though nothing had happened to make people wonder at the doings of No. 14, and perhaps envy it the sensation it had made in that extraordinarily dull quarter of the town.

A week had passed, and yet no news of Margaret; but on the following day a letter came from her to inform her mother that they had had unusually fine weather for their wedding tour; that she and Mr. Ellerton were quite well, and

that they sent their united loves to herself and Bertha, and begged to be remembered to inquiring friends.

The letter was addressed from Paris, and communicated the fact of their immediate departure for Switzerland, where they proposed staying for a short time. But as her husband had to prepare for her reception at his country seat, where certain alterations were being made under the charge of Angus Macleod, she informed them that he had fixed their return to London for the end of the month, to remain there for a few weeks, and then go home and settle down to as much contentment as they could reasonably expect.

As a letter explanatory of their movements, and strictly to be regarded in that light, there was nothing to be particularly found fault with ; but for all that, Mrs. Rushbrook was anything but pleased. She had hoped to hear that Margaret was happy beyond measure, delighted with Paris, charmed by the sights she had seen, and full of anticipation of the sights she hoped to see. She had expected to find her letter full of expressions of thankfulness and gratitude to her for having brought the match about. Instead of which she wrote her a dull, cold, and by no means a lengthy letter, conveying their loves to

Bertha and herself, and assuring her that "she was her affectionate and dutiful daughter, Margaret Ellerton."

Had unexpected pleasure, and the possession of a husband so notoriously rich, failed to excite her vanity, or kindle in her mind some thoughts of worldly pride? Had money lost its power, station its charm, and travelling its delights? It was inexplicable! For though in her own person Mrs. Rushbrook had a soul superior to the vanities of life, she could not so easily get over Margaret's apparent indifference and neglect of them; while her forgetfulness of the pleasures that her husband's unbounded wealth could command, and the consequence it would give her in the eyes of people less well off than herself, puzzled her exceedingly.

Or was she thinking of that pale-faced youth, and indulging in memories of him to the injury of her health? Was she still attached to him, still devoted to him, and still in love with him, her mother had seen stagger up the steps, and then go down the moment he had heard he was too late, and that the bride was gone? She had been a witness to his distress, and felt perhaps more commiseration than she dared confess even to herself, as watching him from the window she had observed him shrink and tremble, as though

the news of Margaret's marriage had suddenly overcome him, and left him barely strength to return to the carriage waiting at the door.

But even presuming her daughter to be so foolish as to retain a girlish liking for that paltry Ensign, it was not to be supposed that she would indulge in it beyond a passing thought, or suffer it to interfere with her duty to her husband. That was impossible, and Mrs. Rushbrook felt certain she would not; notwithstanding some slight uneasiness which at times tormented her when she reflected that after all her care and her anxiety to promote her daughter's happiness she had not been so successful as she had desired.

Difference of temper, difference of ages, might, she sometimes feared, lead to bickerings and disputes. Margaret she knew to be haughty; unused to opposition; and should her husband foolishly attempt to rule her at the outset of her married life, who knew what terrible distress might follow to make them both as wretched as if they were mere nobodies, and had not a shilling to bless themselves with! Let him but treat her kindly, there was not a more dove-like creature in the world than Margaret, nor one more ready to forget all thoughts of self, could it only be shown that by so doing she could contribute to the happiness of others.

Had something of this kind of opposition already shown itself, and had Mr. Ellerton begun by thwarting, instead of endeavouring to persuade? Had any disagreement of this sort been present to her when she penned that letter, or was it merely a listless way of writing, and an indifference which had come upon her now she was married, and when perhaps she had some secret cause of grief fighting at her heart, distracting her into momentary forgetfulness of herself and others?

But when the day of their return arrived, and Bertha and herself received a formal invitation to dine with them at their hotel, Mrs. Rushbrook was indignant. The least, she thought, they could have done, would have been to call on her, and treat her with affection and respect; not coldly ask her to dine with them, as if they thought she wanted a dinner, and would go anywhere to get one. Was it that Mr. Ellerton wished it to be understood that being a man of such superior wealth, his wife's family must be kept at a proper distance, and not allowed to be on too familiar terms with them? Or had Margaret ceased to care for them, and slighted them, to show how vastly superior she was to her poor mother and her sister?

But when she saw her, all coldness was for-

gotten ; Margaret's familiar smile greeted her as of old, at the same time that her tenderness and affection relieved her of all doubts, and made happy once again. Ellerton was gentleness itself : he received them cordially, begged her to forgive their not calling upon them, and excuse it on account of Margaret's fatigue after so long a journey.

Watchful of their slightest action, attentive to each word, and determined to find out whether they agreed or not, Mrs. Rushbrook had the satisfaction to confess that she could discover nothing ! They agreed most admirably. Ellerton was affectionate and kind ; Margaret just a little reserved and timid, but charmingly obedient and proper in her manner. At times, indeed, she thought a little *too* obedient ; and then again she thought she detected an absence in her manner, and an unaccountable inattention to what was said to her, leading her to suppose that she was thinking of something else.

With that exception she was everything that could be desired, and it was quite impossible for any young wife to conduct herself with greater propriety.

The evening passed off very pleasantly. Margaret was evidently delighted to be near her sister again, and conversed with her almost en-

tirely ; chiefly in whispers, or in low confiding tones. Ellerton, on the contrary, devoted himself to Mrs. Rushbrook, and made a point of talking to her on a variety of subjects, as if he had it in his mind to keep her attention occupied, though by an ill-concealed restlessness in his manner, and by the frequent glances he cast towards Margaret, it was easy to perceive he was watching her over her mother's shoulder, and observing her attentively.

He kept her so constantly in his sight, and fixed his eyes upon her with such an anxious, eager look, that Mrs. Rushbrook could not tell what to make of it, until she began to fancy that he was suspicious, if not jealous of his wife ; though by the pains he took to keep his face concealed, it was plain he did not wish her to think he watched her, nor did she seem to be in the least aware he *was* watching her.

His restless manner, the undefined, yet most peculiar expression of his eyes, while it explained nothing, convinced Mrs. Rushbrook that he was dissatisfied with something, or, if not dissatisfied, then that he was willing to believe all was not as it should be, though what he objected to she did not know.

Thus, while he treated Margaret with the greatest fondness, there was at the same time to

be detected a distrust of her, leading his mother-in-law to imagine that though he could not discover that same mysterious something for which he seemed to watch and wait, he would still watch on in hopes to discover it at last.

Had she done wisely, after all, in keeping the knowledge of her daughter's previous engagement a secret from him? Had she acted fairly by him? and might he not at some unlucky moment find it out, upbraid them with want of confidence, treat the matter in a serious light, and exclaim against the deception practised on him, after he had expressly stipulated that there should be no concealment between them?

It was this very want of candour, and the withholding from him the knowledge of her daughter's unpardonable conduct with young Arkwright, that filled her with alarm; induced her to be doubly anxious to conceal it from him now, and keep him in the profoundest ignorance of what had taken place. She knew it would only make matters worse to endeavour to explain it. It could do no good, and might do much harm—lead to a separation or some frightful disagreement between them, and draw on herself his lasting enmity for having aided her daughter to deceive him.

The secret was safe with Margaret; it was

safe with Bertha ; she was quite certain that it was safe with herself ; and, unless Mr. Ellerton had some extraordinary power of discovering what people thought, she could not very well see how he could ever find it out.

It was highly necessary, in the first place, to caution Margaret, and to lecture her on her appearing absent and forgetful at times, as well as on the peculiar habit she had contracted of casting down her eyes the moment her husband looked at her, as though she was afraid of looking at him in return. She must be told to be more lively ; and, by a studied control over her feelings, to endeavour to be more conciliating, so as to remove the impression he evidently entertained that she either disliked him or was thinking of some one else.

Margaret promised to obey, but unfortunately exceeded her instructions ; for on the very next occasion of their meeting, her excitement positively alarmed her mother. She laughed at everything, talked incessantly, and appeared to be so different from her ordinary self, that her husband stared at her in amazement, whilst her mother, seeing the effect produced, was sorry she had lectured her at all, and wished she had left her as she was.

She, of course, did everything that a mother

could do to make her daughter's change of manner less noticeable ; laughed when she laughed, talked when she talked, and did her utmost to induce Ellerton to believe that their laughter was not forced, nor their spirits unusually high, notwithstanding the suspicious glances he cast at them, as much as to say he thought they were.

Now Ellerton was busy with a strange conception working in his brain, that Margaret *was* deceiving him, and that her mother was deceiving him as well. He said nothing ; but at the same time he mentally resolved to remove the daughter from her mother's influence, and keep them as far apart as possible.

But as this could not very well be done during their stay in London, he thought that a little gentle opposition would pave the way to greater, and let her see he was determined not to permit her, as his mother-in law, to interfere between him and his wife.

He knew she had a horror of a theatre, and as to going to a play, or suffering her daughters to go there, she would as soon have thought of walking into her grave ! Now, as Ellerton did not choose that his wife should appear a nonentity in society, or be dumb upon so ordinary a subject as the amusements of the town, he proposed to take her to one of the theatres the following night, and met

the opposition he expected. Mrs. Rushbrook held up her hands and shuddered ; but as Ellerton said he had made up his mind to take her, and as Margaret sat and said nothing, she was obliged to submit, though she shook her head, and relieved her conscience by hoping that “ the roof would not fall upon their heads, or a fire break out, to punish them for their wickedness in venturing into so abominable a place.”

Margaret had her scruples too, but a little persuasion got the better of them, and induced her to comply with her husband’s wish. Of course she was a little nervous and excited on first entering the theatre, but as soon as she got accustomed to the sight of the audience, the brilliant lights, and the magnificent appearance of the interior, she became more easy, gazed eagerly about her, and, though not quite so foolish as to expect to see the Devil’s hot-bed her mother always talked about, she could not at the first shake off the influence she had been brought up to believe in, nor forget what she had been told of the terrible iniquity she would be sure to find if she ever went to a playhouse.

She saw instead of this, a happy and delighted throng willing to be pleased with intellectual amusement ; their faces full of expectation, and anxious for the play to begin ; and when it did

begin, it proved so interesting that her husband felt there would be no difficulty in inducing her to repeat her visit, but that now she found there was no harm in it she would gladly come again, and that it afforded a pleasurable amusement, and awakened a variety of emotions she had never before experienced.

She spoke and talked of nothing else, and looked so happy when he proposed taking her to the play again, he felt satisfied with the success of the experiment, and began to think that the coldness and indifference of which he complained arose, not because she disliked him, but because he had kept her too much secluded, and that instead of allowing her to mix with the world, he had hitherto prevented her taking her share in its amusements.

He then began to think that, for a woman to be happy, she must have a constant change of scene, and a variety of pleasures to make her perfectly contented—that liberality and kindness may do much, but that the true touchstone of a woman's heart is excitement, and excitement she must have if you wish to make an impression on it.

The time arranged for their stay in London had expired, when the announcement of an unusually attractive performance at one of the

principal theatres induced them to remain in town for one night longer. A famous tragedy was to be produced, supported by a company of acknowledged talent, and, as they might never have an opportunity of witnessing such a performance again, Ellerton proposed that they should go and see one of the masterpieces of the English stage acted to the best advantage.

On first entering her box, Margaret experienced little of the old sensations she had felt upon her former visit, but gazed about her as if she could never look enough, nor fully comprehend the dazzling scene presented to her view. When, however, the curtain rose, and the thunder of applauding hands welcomed a favourite, or rewarded him for something great in art, she grew almost bewildered, until the interest of the scene absorbed all other senses, and kept her spell-bound. Breathless and intent upon the working of the plot, she appeared unconscious of everything but the passionate emotion exhibited by the jealous Moor, the grief and suffering of his patient wife.

It was not until the play was over, after the fatal termination, and when the Moor, excited by his jealousy, had killed his wife, that she could look about, and endeavour to shake off her enchantment. Then, after having watched the

slightest incident necessary to the development of the plot, the variety of circumstances essential to the perfect rendering of the play, the strength of character so wonderfully imagined and so exquisitely portrayed, she woke as from a dream, yet fancied she was dreaming still, or only half recovered from the effect produced on her imagination by something strange and terrible.

Even when the storm of applause was hushed, after the reality of the scene had passed, and she was able to take her eyes away, and patiently review the drama as a whole, she could not quite undeceive herself, or feel convinced that what she had seen was but the creation of the poet's brain, and not some stern and fearful fact.

It was so vivid and so true, so full of life and motion, she appeared to forget where she was, or that her husband was sitting by her and talking to her, until she turned and looked, then shrinking back, grew deadly pale, and, fixing her gaze upon him, fancied she saw the same wild flash of jealousy in his eyes she had seen dart from the angry Moor's. She tried to argue with herself that the thing was impossible, and the notion absurd; but the impression left on her imagination was so strong she sought relief in gazing at the theatre, and in listening to the buzz of voices in hopes it might restore her.

Leaning from her box, and busily inspecting the thronged interior of the house, she counted the rows of people, the tiers of boxes, and the elegantly dressed ladies sitting in them, anxious to discover if the impression made on her had been shared by others, and to what extent. People were busy talking, laughing, or shifting in their seats, but though they all appeared to have been amused, she could not detect the same traces of emotion in their faces that had agitated her.

But there below her was another tier of boxes, and rows on rows of people all occupied alike, while right before her, and opposite where she sat, though lower, and on the tier beneath, she saw a face upturned to hers—a pale, white face—that looked across, and riveted its eyes on her.

Scorching as the concentrated light from burning-glasses, the glance of those bright eyes shot through and through her, and, by reproachful gazing, seemed to pierce her heart, as pale, even to deathliness, that face still bent on hers, upturned and blanched, and cold and motionless as if cut in marble.

To look and see that face, to sit and stare at it, to feel her tingling limbs grow numbed and powerless, her hot breath come and go, and her eyesight fail her, were all she was conscious

of, and that but for a moment, before she fainted away.

How it happened she never knew, and was only aware that she had swooned when she felt her hands chafed, and her brow moistened in the lobby of the theatre, to which she had been carried.

Ellerton was close beside her, bending over her, and assisting to restore her, yet watching with a half-suspicious glance if anyone came near besides those he had summoned to her side. He was so anxiously engaged in looking first at her, then on anybody who came nigh, that he did not observe her eyes open, nor the fearful stare she gave on seeing him, nor the way she shrank and turned away, and, hiding her eyes with her hands, fancied she saw the Moor who had killed his wife looking down at her, as if about to stifle her.

She had seen that Moor too recently to forget the terror of his flashing eyes, his torture, and remorse! And now he came again, or her husband in his likeness. There was the same trouble on his brow, the same dark look, and the identical expression in his face that she had seen in Othello's, as if he doubted and suspected, and, maddened by his jealousy, meant to kill her.

He had, indeed, observed her with surprise,

if not suspicion, and, unable to account for her indisposition, began to think she must have seen some one in the theatre whose sudden appearance had overcome her. Some former lover or some unknown admirer, perhaps, to whom she had given her affection, though she had married him, and could not so soon forget, but, on beholding him, her old love came back, and struck her senseless.

It must have been so. If not, why had she looked across so earnestly, trembled, and turned pale, and then fallen back in a death-like swoon?

CHAPTER VII.

THE AVENUE.

THE country seat spoken of by Ellerton, and to which he proposed taking his wife, was distant about forty miles from London, and close to a town in Kent—one of those old-fashioned and substantial mansions of which England has so many, and surrounded by a park famed for its beauty and the richness of its scenery.

On one side, leading directly from an ancient porchway which in his father's time had formed the principal entrance to the house, stood an avenue of elms. Some of the trees had fallen, others were simply propped up by their pendant boughs, whilst in many cases, the roots had spread to such a monstrous size that they more resembled a second growth of boughs turned upside down than ordinary roots. Twisted, gnarled, and spread to such an extent, nothing could be seen but roots, until the ground had the appearance of being covered by enormous serpents, distorted into a variety of forms.

This was a favourite spot with Angus. Here he could lie at his ease, watch the rabbits peep-

ing out of their holes, or burrowing under the roots, and scampering away the moment he lifted his head or threw a stone. This was fine sport, and, having little else to do now that the alterations to the house were well nigh perfected, he and his dogs would come and lie there, and doze the afternoon away in the most perfect contentment.

From roof to cellar, from gabled top to the foundations of the house, repairs had taken place. The rooms had been re-embellished, new furniture brought in, and the entire of the mansion beautified to please the master's young and handsome wife. This did not quite suit Angus. He would have had the house left as it was, its red-tiled roof with never a hand laid on it, and the seams just as they were. He would rather have seen those blocks of chimneys, and the twisted stacks rising heavily above the roof—unpatched, unpieced, and the old mansion as he first saw it when his master left him in charge of it, to look after the workmen and see that the land was kept in order.

Of what use was all this fuss and bother? It was good enough for his master, good enough for him, and good enough for any one but a new-fangled miss come to share his master with him, and deprive him of the pleasure he felt in serving him with all his heart and all his soul.

He knew well enough what would come of it ; how she would want to take the charge of him to herself, and leave poor Angus in the lurch ! He had hitherto had the control of everything. His master was content to trust him, and Angus felt that he deserved to be trusted ; when in comes this pale-faced wife to share his duties with him, and do away with the one sole wish he had, which was, to live for his master, to work for his master, and do anything, but die for him. It would be wrong to request it of him, and no man had a right to ask another to give up his life to serve him. But short of that, and as far as starving went, Angus was content to starve and let his master feast ; watch for him and slave for him, or be his slave indeed ; give himself up to him, and from first to last be his for good or ill.

But not his wife's ! That was a different matter ; and having taken a dislike to her, Angus began to think it not impossible that he might in time positively hate her. She might be tolerably pretty, good-humoured, and not too overbearing in her treatment of him ; but since she had chosen to step between his master and himself, let her look to herself, and not presume on his over-liking to her. She might be mistaken if it came to that, and Angus thought the time might come when she would find it out.

Thus day by day he lazily looked on, sat on the stile, or saw the workmen come and go—the house in order, and the land well kept—everything fit for his master to look upon and say, “Well done, Angus! Well done, my faithful dog—well done, my slave, and now go to your bed of roots; have a good sleep on it, and by-and-by we’ll think of something else. Or maybe think of nothing, but sit on stiles, lounge about the fields, doze under hedges, eat and drink and rest, and never think of dying till death comes with a jump and makes an end of us before we are aware.”

A letter came at last, in which he was informed that his master and mistress would return by a given date, when he was to prepare for their reception and have everything ready by the time they arrived.

This was a comfort deep and profound, though slightly tempered with annoyance—a solace and a heart-ache both at once; for with his master came his wife! But he was home again. Home! or shortly would be home, and delighted with the news, Angus shook off his laziness, ran here and there, roused up the servants, and told them to be sure and have everything in order by the time his master returned.

And when the time arrived—when the carriage

drew near and the park gates opened to admit the mistress of that park and all things belonging to it—the tenantry lined the drive up to the house ; their wives and daughters threw flowers in her path ; the servants mustered in the porch, and the village bells rang out a merry peal to bid them welcome.

All things were bright and joyous—all but the pale white face that smiled, or tried to smile, a greeting in return ; but which at sight of Angus turned to a paler whiteness still ; then shrinking back from the window as if in dread of him, she saw him run towards Ellerton when he alighted, fall upon his knees as if to kiss the ground under his feet, and pay him adoration.

In his anxiety to bid his young wife welcome, Ellerton did not notice Angus, nor the angry glance he cast at Margaret, as, leaning on his arm, he led her up the steps, while his man was left to follow and wait for some sign of recognition at such time as he could tear himself from her side, when his poor despised servant might perhaps come in for his share of notice.

The next day proved a busy one with Angus. He had to do a hundred things ; to run upstairs, leap downstairs, and be in a dozen places at once ; for Ellerton had arranged that his wife should not only go over the park and grounds, but

should be made acquainted with the ancient portion of the mansion as well as the new.

Here, in the bright sunlight, resting beneath the shade of beeches, limes, or chestnuts, he pointed out to her the river winding slowly by, the copses, woods, and meadows, and the gently swelling hills bounding the northern view; the black and frowning avenue of elms, the best view of the house, and the pleasure grounds by which it was surrounded.

Oh, what a dawn of beauty and of peace broke on her as she gazed, and in the quiet prospect, far and near, beheld the perfect charm belonging to a country life. Meadows, fields, wooded slopes, rich pasturage intermixed with the ripple of the young green corn, all looking so calm, so exquisite, she could with difficulty withdraw her gaze, or think of anything but how to look enough.

She thought of this, and of the forgetfulness, if not peace, those scenes might bring to her could she but live her time out there, shut from the world and all its busy cares! But there beside her stood the owner of that land, and all that on it grew. Were he not there, or were some other by her side, who knew how soon those fields and copses might assume a brighter hue, and all things come to meet her wishes and tempt her into peace.

And was this all her own? Was she the mistress of that park, those fields, dense copses, and the adjacent stream winding and glimpsing through the meadows close at hand? Were all those trees her own to sit beneath and gaze upon? —to see the mellow tints steal on their leaves and watch their changing hues? Was all this meant for her, and held in store for her, and pointed out to her as hers—to live in and enjoy; and could she, then, look coldly on the giver of those joys? deaden her heart to him, behold his efforts to please her with indifference, and think of him with harshness because he had won her from the arms of some one else?

Would that be fair? Would it be just to him, and ought she not to endeavour to appear contented even if she felt she could not return his love? Should she not struggle with herself and overcome that horrid fear she had of him; the distrust she had of him, and her dread of the jealous doubting way he had of looking at her, as if to read her heart and see if he were really thought of in it, or held a second place in her affection?

She thought of this while looking on that calm repose, and thought, perhaps, that though she could not love him as she wished, she might yet evince her gratitude, and prove her thankfulness

by endeavouring to be contented — look on him less coldly; be less reserved and formal in her manner, and never say a word to anger him, or do the slightest thing to injure or annoy him.

She looked up as she thought of this, and, prompted by her new-born feeling, tried to smile her thanks, and satisfy him of her happiness. But as she looked she met that searching glance, with which he always viewed her now, still fixed on her, still bent on her, then sinking her eyes she stood diffident and perplexed, her very fear causing him to regard her more narrowly, and calling forth a corresponding distrust of her, while her dislike to meet his eye excited his suspicion and made him think there must be some cause for it.

One day, as they were walking, and after she had endeavoured to think of the past with less regret, and of the future with greater hope, she spoke of the happiness she experienced at finding the handsome home he had provided for her, and the comforts on all sides surrounding her.

“The place is well enough,” said Ellerton; “and if my mind were only at ease, I should be perfectly contented. I am sorry I cannot congratulate myself on being so happy as I could wish.”

“But peace of mind and riches, we are assured, do not always go together.”

“I know it, and I feel it sensibly. Could riches command the peace men covet, the prince might look upon the beggar as unhappy, and brag of his superior enjoyment. But is this so? Are rich men really more contented than the poor? Free to come and go, the poor, perhaps, may have a keener sense of independence, and feel a more delightful burst of pleasure at the knowledge of the unfettered life they lead than kings or princes can ever hope to enjoy.”

“Yet I was thinking—and at the very moment that you spoke——”

“Of what?”

“How a sense of pleasure, such as this place affords, would make people happy in spite of themselves. There is nothing wanting here—nothing to be desired! And having this we ought to be doubly thankful, and endeavour by all means in our power to prove ourselves deserving of the blessing it affords.”

“My father no doubt purchased wisely, and laid out his money with the view to benefit himself and those belonging to him, thinking to see his children enjoy what he had provided for their good. But did he? Did he enjoy that pleasure and content of which you spoke just

now, and see his sons grow up to honourable station and renown? Did he not rather curse his fortune, which, while it gave him the means to contribute to their welfare, seemed but to estrange them from him and make his life a constant torment."

"I remember your having mentioned this before."

"Here, then, is another proof that wealth does not contribute to a peaceful end! He had better have sent his boys into the world (his eldest son at least) than see him turn out as he did, simply because he preferred his liberty and had a mind to do as he liked. And then to lose all trace of him, and know that at his death his rough, wild, younger son (whom he could never bring himself to like) would step into his brother's shoes and succeed to what he had to leave! What, think you, was that father's peace or comfort then? or how could he look upon this pleasant scene unless with torment and regret, or be consoled by the reflection that that wild younger son might in his turn find his disappointment here, and waking from a dream of hope, realise the daily teaching of this life that what we covet most is most unlikely to be obtained, and a successful issue to our desires least probable of completion."

He spoke in a low tone, accompanied by a look at Margaret which she had no difficulty in interpreting. That look, so searching and so keen, informed her that he conceived he had some reason to doubt the warmth of her affection, and that some unknown impediment was set between the perfect confidence he had hoped to find and the love he had thought to gain !

Pain and grief, and jealous doubting were mingled in that look, and Margaret felt that her coldness and reserve had been the cause ; but as Angus was waiting at the gate, and Ellerton pausing by her side, she had not time to express herself in words, but turning with a changed expression, and a look of greater tenderness than she had ever yet assumed, she held out her hand, then taking his arm and slightly pressing it, seemed by that gentle action to assure him that she was not so indifferent as he supposed, but that with time and patience her heart might yet be won, and his hope of securing her affection be realised.

That touch so slight, so timidly impressed, was more than sufficient ; snatching her hand, and kissing it, he placed his arm round her, and drew her gently to his side.

They made the circuit of the park, and returning by way of the Avenue, stood to look into

its leafy tunnel—to observe its dreary aspect, the decayed appearance of the trees, the choked-up pathway, and the matted leaves lying thickly on the ground.

A glimpse was enough for Ellerton. Turning on his heel, he was about to take Margaret round by the principal entrance, when, attracted by its gloominess, and wishing to be informed where it led, she asked—

“But that old avenue of trees——”

“Oh, they are not worth looking at, and only wait for the axe to make a clean sweep, when I will have the roots grubbed up, and the decayed trunks and broken boughs got rid of.”

“But why? It seems a thousand pities to destroy a place in which you might almost fancy yourself secluded from the world, or on the outskirts of a primeval forest.”

“It is old enough, I grant, and older than the house, which at the time it was built no doubt faced the avenue, that being the nearest way into the road, and the best approach. Nearly all old houses stand at the end of avenues. It was the taste of the times; but like most old-fashioned things it has given place to new.”

“Don’t you think it must have been better as it was, and couldn’t it be restored by planting fresh trees where the old ones are decayed?”

“No. I hate the very sight of that old avenue, and always did. It seems to me like a way up to a churchyard, and leading to something disagreeable. My father hated it as much as I do, and, by making a new front to face the south, turned the house, if I may say so, the other way; though, strange to say, he left the old trees standing, and did not grub them up, as I hope soon to do.” Then observing Margaret still hang back, he said, “But come, we have had enough of this, and since you like to look at dismal places, I will show you where my brother was confined, and the very bed on which he lay, on the night before he left his father’s house to join the gipsies.”

Curious to see if it at all realised her expectation from Ellerton’s previous description, Margaret took her husband’s arm, and passing round to the chief entrance of the house, left the avenue to be inspected at some other time.

But before he took her to that outer room, he first of all proposed to show her the house itself, the passages, the galleries, and the old attics, swarming with rats and crumbling into decay. But as Margaret said she would take all that for granted, and particularly disliked rats, Ellerton gave up that part of their investigation, though he still maintained the old rooms to be worth seeing, and that something might be made of

them by a little alteration, and after the rats had been smoked out.

They had gone on talking until the much dreaded rats could be heard pattering over their heads, when Ellerton suggested that they should retrace their steps since Margaret was so afraid of them, and going down the back staircase, he descended into the corridor that led directly to the old porchway, on the outside of which the room he spoke of was situated.

Leading Margaret by the hand he conducted her down a flight of stairs connecting the domestic offices with the first-floor landing, and formerly used by the servants for the service of the upper part of the house. Descending this, they found themselves in the ancient corridor, rich in scroll and ornamental work, which, according to the original design, led from the old porchway to the principal chambers then in use.

Throwing the door wide open, Angus led the way outside, then pointing to the mysterious room, waited to be informed what next he had to do.

Beyond the porch, and close upon a clump of evergreens, so thickly set that you could hardly see the pathway between them, lay the room itself. Ilex, yew, and holly, all growing in a heap, and to such a height, long centuries must have

passed before they could have arrived at their present girth or spread to such an extent.

But it was the door of the room, not the evergreens, she looked at. It appeared so thick and solid, and the lock of such a size, its strength seemed sufficient to defy all ordinary force, independent of the extra pains taken to secure it by bars and chains, looking as if they could never be wrenched away.

The unusual strength of the fastenings naturally excited surprise, when she remembered what Ellerton had said of his brother having escaped without leaving the least trace of his flight behind. But as the inside had yet to be examined, she thought she might there discover the secret of his flight, or detect some clue to the means by which he had effected it.

There was nothing to be seen inside any more than without ; nothing but an ordinarily shaped room, a grated window set at a considerable height, and the door they had just come in at. There was no second door, and nothing but that window through which he could have got out. But then, the bars would have prevented that ; and as her husband assured her they had not been disturbed, but were found as strongly fastened in the masonry as ever, she was as much at a loss as any, and gave up guessing, as Ellerton had, and as his father had before him.

There was a fireplace it was true ; but the aperture was so small, nothing larger than a child could possibly have climbed up that, and as to a secret panel, or a slide, that was out of the question, there being no woodwork but a narrow skirting running round the bottom of the floor, and the door already mentioned.

How then had he escaped ? It might be reasonable enough to suppose that the gipsies would have endeavoured to assist him if they wished to get him into their power ; but unless they had broken through the door, or wrenched away the bars, how could they have got at him ? It was a mystery to all who had inquired into it, and so it was likely to remain.

Now, strange to say, Angus had taken a fancy to that room. It was dark and lonely, and so entirely to his mind, that he began to think there was not another room like it in the world ; it lay at the bottom of the house, and was therefore a good place to guard it, while the shade thrown by the evergreens struck him as being famous to take an afternoon nap in, or to smoke his pipe in, when not otherwise employed on his master's business.

On being questioned by Ellerton why he liked it, and why he preferred sleeping in that room to any other, he replied—

“I don’t know how it is, master, but it seems as though we was made for one another. Perhaps I liked it because nobody else did, and said they was afraid to sleep in it. Besides, there’s plenty of room in it, and nothing to spoil—that’s another reason; and as for the bed, I don’t think I ever saw so good a one. It ain’t like a bed somehow, and as it’s long and narrow, I sometimes fancy I am in a tent, and could go on sleeping till to-morrow morning.”

“With all my heart, so long as you sleep soundly, sleep and welcome. And as you are so fond of a tent, you can fancy yourself among the gipsies again, where you slept soundly enough in all conscience.”

“It was very bad of me, master, to do as I did when you wanted me, perhaps, and didn’t know where to find me. But if you only look it over this once, I’ll never go to sleep again, no not in all the days of my life.”

But as Ellerton only laughed at this, Margaret felt it cruel and unkind of him to take so little notice of the ceaseless pains Angus took to convince him of his gratitude, and thought to make amends by speaking kindly to him herself, and to show him that though his master slighted him, she was not unmindful of the claim he had on his attention.

Looking at him with a half averted glance, lest he should perceive the unaccountable dread which, spite of herself, she always had of him, she said—

“ But you must surely find it very dull and lonely to be so far away from the other servants. Why not go into the house and choose an apartment there? It would, I should think, be more comfortable than sleeping in this miserable room.”

“ It’s very kind of you to say so, mistress, and of master to treat me as he does, though I don’t deserve it. But I am better out here than anywhere else, for the servants don’t like me, and look as if I wasn’t half smart enough to go a-nigh ’em. All but one, and I think she is half ashamed if people see me talking to her.”

“ Oh, then, there is some one you like, and who likes you, though you dislike the other servants?”

“ I should be a precious rascal if I disliked any one master thought good enough to wait on him. That ain’t like me, mistress; and, though the housekeeper does get cross sometimes, and calls me names when she catches me talking with Jane——”

“ Oh, it’s Jane, is it?” Margaret was pleased to hear that there was a woman in the house who had power over him.

“ Oh, bless you, yes. But you see it makes no difference; Jane and I talk for all that, and see no harm in it, so long as master doesn't. If he does, why Jane, and all the women that was ever born might be for Angus. He knows his duty better than that, and means to show it, too, to the best master God ever gave to a man, and the best friend as ever stood by another when he could not help himself, and was as nigh drowned as could be.”

The gratitude he expressed, little as it impressed his master, made Margaret shudder when she reflected that, at one word from her husband he would comply with anything he wished, and do his bidding, let who might suffer by it.

That room, and all about the place struck her as being more lonesome and more dull than ever, as she looked first at her husband, then at Angus; its cage-like aspect more like a prison, and the dark shade of the evergreens more dark and solemn than before—more like a cypress grove, and death waiting at the end to lead them to a grave.

She breathed more freely when she quitted it; then, leaning on her husband's arm, endeavoured to shut out the recollection of the place, the fear associated in her mind with Angus, and the dread she had of him.

But she could not. He, she knew, was left in undisturbed possession of that place ; to sleep upon that bed, and in his dreams perhaps to see the shade of him, who forty years before had lain upon that bed, and slept there for the last time beneath his father's roof.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD BAY WINDOW.

ANGUS was not a general favourite, and what was more, he did not care to be one. He had notions of his own as to whom he liked and disliked, and all the coaxing in the world would have been thrown away upon him, unless he had first of all taken a fancy to the person who aspired to the honour of winning his good graces.

He was not very sociable nor over-anxious to please. But then he was good natured, and would do anybody a good turn who asked it, and had not done anything particularly to offend him. The men, as a rule, fought shy of him, for he was a strong-built, long-armed fellow, and might have proved an awkward customer if offended or bullied by anybody who tried to impose upon him in hopes of making fun of him to please the women, who, to say the truth, were not too partial to him either, but did everything in their power to make the place disagreeable to him.

But Angus did not care for that. He did not care twopennee what they thought so long as they let him alone, and did not quiz Jane for

talking to him on the sly ; or tell her mother of it to make the old woman more cross than usual. What he wanted was to lead a quiet life, and to do as little as he could, but upon every possible occasion to hold himself in readiness to serve his master, and please him to the best of his ability.

It was this constant watching, this almost slavish worship of her husband, that made Margaret regard him with increased attention, and feel that, shadowy as the line was which distinguished him from the brute, he had all the brute's strange, listless way with him, the same dull habit of enjoyment, the same contentment with his condition that brutes have with theirs, and perhaps, she thought, the same ferocity if excited into rage.

At times, indeed, when his master set him to some task, or made him take his share of labour in the grounds, he would work hard enough, and do whatever he was bidden to do ; but, beyond that, nothing. The moment his task was done he would fall off into the same listless manner, and go on dreamily as before.

The only person who appeared to have the slightest influence with him was Jane, the house-keeper's daughter, though what she saw in him, or how she came to tolerate his addresses, was unaccountable ; for Jane was a good-looking

girl, and not likely to be in want of a sweetheart if she wanted one.

But her mistress did not know as much of Jane as Jane knew of herself, or the object she had in making people suppose she liked Angus when she hated him most cordially.

Now Jane was simply a flirt, and thought that, by making it appear she was on good terms with Angus, the head gardener would grow desperate, and make her an offer without more ado; that, if he had anything to say, he would say it the moment he saw some one else was after her, and that, if he were not quick about it, she would be snapped up and married before he well knew where he was.

This was not fair to Angus, and perhaps Jane might have felt it was not, had she not been sensible of the utter impossibility of winning him from his master, and making him do as she desired. She had tried it too often not to be certain of that. Just as she thought she had succeeded, and he was inclined to be loving, let him but hear his master's voice, away he flew, and satisfied her he was not a man to be depended on; but that the gardener, if he were not so sluggish, was infinitely to be preferred, and would make twice as good a match if she could only make him jealous and drive him to despair.

It was to this same love-making, Angus in his simplicity, had confessed, and, having enlightened Margaret on his one assailable point, she determined to profit by it, so that in case of his ever having it in his power to do her an injury, she might work on his feelings through his sweetheart, and persuade him to act kindly instead of cruelly towards her.

The service so unscrupulously exacted by Ellerton, and as faithfully discharged by Angus, proved a source of infinite annoyance to her. They could not even go for a ramble in the fields, or take an evening walk, but Angus was sure to be hanging on their steps, and following at a distance, in hopes his master might want him; and even when she did not see him she knew that he saw them, and watched them through a gap in a hedge, while at other times he would run before, wait for them on the stile he knew they must get over, or swing on the gate he knew they must pass through, until she dreaded to go out, and had to invent excuses so frequently for staying at home, they at last seemed frivolous.

This watching became so unbearable at last, that she told her husband of it, and begged him not to permit it; but as he only laughed at her, and said she would soon grow used to it, she was

forced to be contented, but at the same time determined to keep quite as sharp a watch on Angus as Angus kept on her; and, on her husband's leaving home for a day or two, she resolved to profit by his absence, and find out all about him—his habits, his manners, and the way he passed his time.

She did not notice much difference in him when her husband was away or at home. He slept a little longer, and took his ease, perhaps, more frequently during his absence, but, in all other respects, he was the same idle, uncouth fellow, and as little given to habits of industry as any person she had ever seen.

His chief place of resort appeared to be the outside room, the avenue, and the evergreens where the shade was darkest. By looking from her bedroom window she could observe him at all hours of the day at one place or the other, and even at night she could hear him singing or whistling as he walked up and down, or rested against the doorway of the outside room.

The drawing-room occupied the whole front of the house, and commanded an extensive view of the distant country. The bed-chamber was not so well situated, for it looked directly on the avenue, and towards the town. But then the bedchamber did not fill up the whole of that

side of the house, and she was rather at a loss to understand how the rest of the space was occupied, and if there were not some other rooms lying next her own with which she was unacquainted.

There were three doors to the bedroom: one opening on the gallery, another—that furthest from the windows—led to her husband's dressing-room, and communicated with an inner room, in which he kept his fishing-rods and guns, his curiosities, and a variety of weapons he had brought from the East; and a third, on the same side, but nearer to the window, corresponding with it in shape and size.

She had noticed these two doors frequently, and had asked her husband why only one was used and the other kept locked, since it must surely lead somewhere, and did not look like a door made for the sake of uniformity; but as he assured her that it had been closed since his father's death, and that he almost forgot what the rooms it led to were like, she took no further notice, and, but for watching Angus, might never have thought of it again, or not until the alterations proposed by her husband came into operation.

But now her curiosity was excited, and she longed to know what lay beyond that doorway, and where it led to.

By leaning out of the window she had noticed, not only a window next her own, but an old bay-window beyond that again, projecting over the porchway facing the avenue, and overhanging the narrow space left between the outside room and the evergreens.

That bay-window haunted her: she could think of nothing else; and knowing that if she could only reach it she should be able to keep Angus constantly in sight, she resolved to open the door and satisfy herself it either did lead to that peculiarly-constructed chamber, or did not.

She knew her husband would not be angry, for he had often wished that she should make herself familiar with the house, and discover her way about it. But what was she to do? None of the keys fitted the door; it was locked or otherwise fastened, and there appeared no way of opening it but by force.

She tried, gently at first, but finding it still keep fast, she applied her utmost strength and saw it yield. Some unseen fastening suddenly gave way, when the door flew open, and left her relieved of her apprehension, not only as to what might be beyond, but at liberty to enter and examine for herself.

It led, as she now saw, into a large, but dismal-looking room, of about the size of her

bed-chamber, but so dark she could hardly see her way, for the shutters were closed, and what little light there was came through a sort of archway connecting the apartment with another, seemingly of smaller size, and dimly lighted through some aperture.

No one was there, yet she stepped as softly—stole upon her tiptoes, and held her breath—as if afraid of meeting some one, or of calling up the spirits of the old dwellers in those dismal rooms to watch her as she went, and wonder at her trespassing in a place so long uninhabited and kept secluded from mortal eyes.

Once through the archway, she found herself in the bay-windowed room itself. It was so still and lonely, so desolate and dim, she was glad she had not known of it before, nor been aware how near that old-fashioned window and those creaking floors lay to her bed-chamber. But now she was there, she thought she might as well take notice of what she saw, and observe attentively all things in connexion with it.

There was not much to be seen : old furniture, moth-eaten and tumbling to pieces ; a few chairs and tables, an old-fashioned harpsichord, and a clock long since run down.

But what attracted her most of all was the bay-window ; and looking out, she saw the out-

side room lying directly under it, the clump of evergreens immediately facing it, and appearing more dark and melancholy now than ever, seen through those dusky panes, and hardly to be distinguished for the crust deposited on them by weather-stains and time.

Here, unobserved by Angus, she fancied she should at least have the opportunity of watching him as he was in the habit of watching her, and frequently resorted to it in hopes to arrive at a knowledge of his character through such signs and tokens as she presumed she might be able to detect of his being either cruel or revengeful.

He was neither—at least so far as she could perceive. The dogs appeared to be fond of him—that was one good sign—and played with him; while he on his part often gave them a portion of his meal, or lay down beside them, basking in the sun. Sometimes, indeed, he seemed angry with them, but even when he scolded, he scolded good-naturedly, and threatened more than he performed.

The more she observed him, the more she taxed herself with cowardice at being afraid of such a harmless savage, yet could not keep her eyes from him, despite the apparent harmlessness of his ways, and the indolence he displayed upon every possible occasion. The object of his life

being, as far as she could see, a state of constant listlessness; his desire, to do nothing; and his principal difficulty how to keep his eyes open.

She gave him up in sheer despair, at last, of seeing him different from what she had seen or hoped to see; and though she constantly sat in that room, and read in it, she did not busy herself so often in looking from it, but contented herself with an occasional glance or two towards the avenue, or to where the shade from the evergreens fell like a huge blot upon the ground.

Summer had long since passed. Autumn was on the wane, and the leaves upon the trees were getting bronzed and brown. November was close at hand, and winter nights she knew would soon be on them. She had no fear of them, nor of solitude, nor of seclusion, so that she had books to read, and an opportunity for employing her time in thinking of the past.

Her fear was of herself, when shut up with her husband in that house, and prevented the comparative freedom she now enjoyed of roaming about and doing as she pleased. She would be left alone with him then, and, as it were, shut from the world with him, without a friend or relative to exchange a word with, and take off

the monotony of her present life ; and picturing to her mind how different her life had been with him she loved, to passing it with one she had sworn to honour and obey, but could not love, she became more melancholy and troubled every day.

Not that she ever let him see she did not love him ; on the contrary, she endeavoured to appear as if she did love him, and to be as agreeable as she could. But nature fighting in her heart, imposed a difficult task upon her, and made her nervous, and afraid lest he should detect her in the part she played, and grow indignant at her deception.

Thus thrown upon her own resources, she sought to relieve the tediousness of the time by attending to her duties, in visiting the poor and relieving their distresses. She was content—or at all events she tried to appear contented, and never led her husband to believe that, but for him, she should have been happier and better pleased, had he not come between her and her hopes.

Contrasting her present indifference with her former earnestness, the sameness of her life with the delight she had thought to find with Frederick, she fell into fits of despondency—into the old forgetfulness of which her mother had complained

during her stay in town, and a dejected, nervous manner, from which she could not rouse herself, though she tried, fearing her husband might detect her secret in her looks, and discover it where she had hoped to keep it—hidden in her heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STILE BY THE POND.

ELLERTON's stay in London had been prolonged by a variety of causes, and as Margaret seldom had an opportunity of thinking, or of walking, unless in his company, she thought to indulge her desire for seclusion by going to a spot she had visited some time before, where, free from interruption, she hoped to pass the greater part of the day unknown to any of the household, and where they could not find her even if they wished.

The spot she had selected lay by the margin of a stream, just at the point where the water spread into a kind of lake, and a shallow pool, overgrown by water-lilies, reached from the stream towards the meadows, and a sedgy bank close on their borders.

It lay a little from the pathway, near enough for the bushes to fringe the pathway, and at the same time to throw their shadows on the water, except in one delightful nook, where the bushes joined a thicket, and left a piece of soft green sward between the lake and them.

She had discovered it one day by the merest

accident, searching for wild flowers by the stream, and, having found it, she thought she would go there when she wished to be alone, or felt inclined for solitude.

She felt that inclination now, and, passing slowly on, kept by the borders of the stream until she came in view of a low stile and a hedge joining the thicket, and separating the meadows from the park.

Two pathways led directly from that stile, one branching to the right, the other going straight before her. She did not go so far as that, but, creeping between the bushes bordering the stream, found herself at the end of a short walk upon the piece of turf previously noticed, where she stood to look about, enchanted by the beauty of the spot, and congratulated herself she had discovered a retreat so free from interruption that she might sit there all day long, and no one suspect her being there.

The pool lay at her feet, its surface without a ripple, and the sedges growing close beside the bank. There was no wind—none that she could feel, at least—and yet those sedges waved and rustled, and, by a ceaseless motion, seemed to indicate that a breeze was stirring strong enough to bow their feathery tops, although she could not detect it.

Close under the thicket, arched over by the leaves, and protected from observation by the intersecting branches, lay a small mound of earth, moss-grown and sloping, and forming a convenient seat. Placing her work-basket and book beside her, she sat and gazed upon that glassy lake, spreading and spreading far away, and laving the green margin close up to her feet.

She sat some time in silence, then opened her book and tried to read; but the lake was before her, and, bending her eyes on that instead of her book, she gave over reading, and watched the dab-chicks as they ran across the floating leaves, or dived and rose up on the other side; then listening to their sharp, quick cry, she fell into a fit of thinking, and remained indifferent to the wild bird's cry and the sedges rustling close at hand.

Were her thoughts fixed upon that tiny lake, or following in imagination the stream *beyond* the lake, and thinking of the distant sea it might have to join and mingle with before it became lost in its immensity? As far away lay all her hopes of peace! as distant and as difficult to reach the end of her desires! Yet could they but flow where she wished, and meet at last her hoped-for comfort—let them flow as slowly as they would, peace was in store for her, happiness was in store for her, and not a passionless emotion

and a troubled future such as she felt were now awaiting her.

Yet still the rustling of the sedges, and the trembling motion of the leaves, came like the faintest sound of music to break the silence, and rouse her to a state of dreamy consciousness as to where she was, and how she came there. Then, listening to that gently-toned and modulated whisper creeping through the leaves, she thought she heard her lover call across the water to her, and, bending down her head to catch the faintest murmur of that silvery sound, could not help indulging in the fancy that she heard it again, till, from the gurgling of the stream and the low buzzing floating in the air, she conjured up a breathing harmony, shaped it into syllables, and ran it into words.

She was so won at last to silence, and rendered so susceptible to sound, she could detect the slightest breath blown across the water, and catch the faintest sigh wafted through the trees, until from listening, she began to think that, by gazing and speaking to that shallow pool, it could answer her inquiry, and resolve her doubts even of herself—comfort and console her, and shed a soothing influence upon her—when all at once she heard a footstep, and then a low, dull humming, as of some one singing to him-

self, and coming along the pathway outside the bushes.

Turning in the direction of the sound, but keeping perfectly quiet, she heard a heavy foot-fall on the ground, and the low chanting of some unknown song. It was so wild and strange, so distinct, yet so subdued, she listened more attentively than ever, until she began to fancy that she had heard that song before, and had heard Angus sing it beneath the window where she sometimes sat and watched unknown to him.

The footsteps drew nearer, and, after passing the bushes, suddenly stopped, though the low chanting still continued, and the humming of the unknown song which had so alarmed her on first hearing it.

Confident in the security of her retreat, and that, though she could see, no one could see her, she turned softly, and, peeping between the leaves, saw, to her dismay, Angus sitting on the stile within a few yards of her.

On seeing him so near, and afraid lest he should discover her in a place so lonely, she remained perfectly quiet, and, making up her mind not to stir till he went away, drew her breath softly, and watched him as he sat lounging on the stile.

Quite at his ease, and sitting as if he intended to remain there all day long, Angus took out his

pipe, and, after filling it, he fell to smoking without more ado, little guessing that his mistress lay concealed behind the thicket, and was watching his slightest motion, while he still smoked and took no notice of anything about him.

Weary with watching him sitting on that stile, and swinging one leg while he rested the other—not daring to move, and fearing he might presume on the loneliness to insult her—she felt relieved when she saw a man come across the further meadow and keep in the direction of the stile.

He was dressed half like a gamekeeper, half like a gipsy; and wore a dark vest fastened up to the chin, and over that a long velveteen coat with huge pockets and large brass buttons. His clothes were neither very clean nor very new; but to make amends, he had a bright-coloured handkerchief twisted round his throat, while the ends tucked inside the top of his dingy waistcoat made up for the loss of linen, which, as a rule, did not appear to advantage on a gentleman whose desires apparently lay more in the direction of stealing than wearing it; so that his having no collar or shirt to be seen may be accounted for under that head, and explain why he had not the smallest speck of anything about him that could be said to be clean.

His face certainly was not. It was smoke-

dried and sallow, and looked as though it had been steeped in a tanpit and taken out a little too soon. His beard was scrubby, and the whites of his eyes so discoloured that had it not been for the black beads shining in them they might have been taken for a part of his skin, and no great harm done to either.

The man advanced smoking a short pipe, and, on getting near the stile, came to a sudden halt at sight of Angus, then thrusting his hands in his pockets, and straddling his bow legs as if bestriding a horse, he remained in that picturesque attitude for a minute or more, attentively observing him.

Unconscious of the interest his appearance excited, or of the gentleman in the velveteen coat scanning him from head to foot, Angus sat absorbed in his pipe, and having smoked it, turned to knock out the ashes, when he became aware that some one was standing a few yards off, and waiting, as it appeared, to get over the stile.

The man looked at Angus—Angus looked at the man; but neither stirred nor said a word.

It was evident that they did not know each other, and as good manners seldom stood in the way of either, it became a question who would have looked longest, or have smoked the longest, had not the man suddenly discovered that his

pipe was out and that he had no tobacco left to fill it with.

As this seemed to afford an opportunity for a little conversation, the man appeared inclined to take advantage of it, and on Angus shifting his legs to make room for him, he advanced, apparently with the intention of speaking, or of getting over the stile.

Instead of getting over now that there was plenty of room, he put one foot on the lower rail, and hanging over the top bar, looked up and nodded.

Angus nodded back again ; but as at that moment he was about lighting his pipe, he made his nod as short as possible ; converted it into a sort of bob, and finished lighting up without taking further notice.

The gentleman in the velvetene coat, loose breeches, and drab gaiters, watched the operation as he leant on the stile, and seeing it perfected, he said—

“ Ain’t you got a bit o’ baeca about you you could give a chap?”

This just suited Angus. Willing to oblige, he took out his tobacco and handed it to the man.

“ Ain’t you got a light as well ? If you ain’t, lend us your pipe a bit and I’ll manage somehow.”

Angus did as he was bid ; he handed down his pipe, and watched the man light up in his turn.

This process over, and the pipe returned, there seemed nothing left for it but to smoke, and see which of the two could blow out the greatest quantity.

Their merits were nicely balanced in that respect, and as they appeared to have nothing else to do, they might have continued to smoke while the tobacco lasted without either of them speaking, or taking the least notice of the other, had not the stranger taken rather a larger share of the stile than belonged to him, which slightly discommoded Angus, so that he had to shift a little on one side ; after which he leaned his back against the upright and made himself as comfortable as he could.

The man did the same ; with this difference, that instead of leaning backward he leaned forward—leaned bodily over the top rail ; shifted his left foot for his right, and then, as if the dearest object of his life consisted in seeing who could keep silence longest, he smoked incessantly.

This was a sort of companion Angus could understand. He could get on with him, and not be put to the unnecessary trouble of talking when he did not feel inclined.

But his pipe was out, and while filling another, he said between the puffs—

“You’re a nawken,^a ain’t you?”

The man turned on him with rather a startled expression on hearing himself addressed in his own language, and replied—

“How came you to speak gipsy cant? It’s not every gaugie^b as can do that.”

“Nor every chor^c as can find a caunie^d when the mangs^e gone down. But your fluff’s^f alight, so you needn’t to look as if you wanted to pull out your keechan^g because I gave you the stuff to fill it with.”

“Who the bing^h are you, I should like to know, and how came you to be so pat at tinkler’s language? You’re a beengaugieⁱ maybe as has been getting hold of one of the kids, or some old woman basket-making under a hedge, to tell you a thing or two.”

“It’s not one of the chauvies^k nor an old managie as told it me, though they sometimes does to gentlefolk as gives ’em a sixpence to buy slaps^l with. I don’t exactly know how I came by it, though I can speak it as well as if I

^a Gipsy.

^b Man.

^c Thief.

^d Hen.

^e Moon.

^f Pipe.

^g Knife.

^h Devil.

ⁱ Gentleman.

^k Children.

^l Tea.

had been born to it, and understand it better still."

"Lowie^a has done it before to-day, that I know well enough," replied the man, "though you don't look a chap likely to have much of that, and gipsies don't tell their secrets for nothing. But it strikes me I know you; and, as I come across the field just now, and saw you on that stile, there was something in the cut of you as told me you was one of us, though how the devil you came to be one is more than I can tell."

"It's not one of you I am, that's certain, unless I was stolen when I was a chanvie,^b and don't remember nothing about it now."

"Ain't you the chap as come into my tent and tucked yourself under my blanket when old Daniel sat by the fire, and the beengaugie crossed his hand with a bright new sovereign? I mean that night old Daniel was found in the ditch with his head banged in, and a hedge-stake by his side, as it was supposed some one done it with."

"I don't know nothing of that, though it's into a tent I got that night, sure enough, when my good master—God bless his name—went into the green lanes to try and find out something as

^a Money.

^b Child.

he thought the people of the old tribe could tell him of."

"That's when it was, and when old Daniel made such a fuss at tellin' what he knew. I only wish it had been me instead as knowed it, I'd have made something more out of it than a sovereign, and mayhap have taken better care of it."

"And was it you as I laid alongside of in the tent, and did not know as I had waked you? You must sleep light, my nawken. Though gipsies always does, and ain't to be caught napping."

"The buzzing of a gnat would wake me if I wasn't used to it; though, if I was, it might ding in my ears as loud as thunder and make no difference. Had one of our dogs comed in and curled itself up on my straw, he'd have done it safe enough, and not been found out. But you was not one of our jucals,^a and had as much chance of creeping into my tent without my knowing it, as I should have of getting in at your blinker,^b unless the bars was first pulled out, and I could climb up high enough."

"Oh, you've had a turn at my window, have you? Don't try that on again, or you'll burn your fingers at it. Only try to sneak in there,

^a Dogs.

^b Window.

or rob master of a single roy, I'll blow your brains out as soon as look at you. He did the best of good to me ; and Angus Macleod ain't going to forget it neither, so you make a mark of that."

" Oh, it's Angus Macleod, is it ?"

" Why not, and who's to say it ain't ? As to broken victuals, and odd things to comfort the old people, you're welcome ; and some of these nights I'll come and have a smoke with you, and a sleep in one of your tents, which is more to my mind than sleeping in a bed."

" That's easy enough ; and any night you like come and have a pick out of the pot, and a puff of bacca with a friend. We are at the old camping-ground again, for now old Daniel has got over the knock on his head a little, he won't rest anywhere else, so you see the young men are obliged to humour him a bit to keep him in good temper for the time he lasts, which can't be much longer, and he over eighty already. Them old men want a deal of killing, and their heads are more hard to crack than an iron pot. A worn-out saucepan, now, is easy enough, and when past tinkering, why a good kick smashes it. But an iron pot, mind you, ain't so easy done. No more ain't Daniel."

This rather rambling discourse of pots and

pans gave Angus and the gipsy an opportunity to fill their pipes and light them once again, whilst Margaret, painfully impressed by what she had heard, yet afraid to move lest the quick ears of the gipsy should discover her, was forced to endure her cramped, uneasy attitude, in the hope of hearing further.

That the gipsy knew more of the injury inflicted on old Daniel than he chose to tell, was tolerably certain. It was also evident that he had some object in associating with Angus, and she resolved to listen to their conversation, so that she might be prepared to caution her husband about him, and set him on his guard.

“That war a rum story, warn’t it,” the fellow went on, “old Daniel told the riah^a as he sat in the smoke, and did not know as anyone was awake beside himself. If it warn’t that I know what an odd un the old chap is, and how he sticks up for the people of your place, I should say it was a pack of lies he had been tellin’, and made out of his head on purpose.”

“What talking do you mean? I heard nothin’ and don’t care a curdie^b whether he lied or not.”

“That’s because you was asleep, and did not listen to his chee.^c Had you been wide awake

^a Gentleman.

^b Halfpenny.

^c Talk.

as I was, you would have been up to what he said, and able perhaps to tell a chap what you thought of it. I'd give something to know whether it was lies or not ; for if so be as it warn't, then a friend I know of would come down handsome and pay according."

"I don't know nothing of what you say."

"Why this I say," resumed the gipsy, looking hard at Angus, and for the first time showing that he had some object in speaking to him, though he pretended not to care whether he spoke or not: "it would be a matter of ten pounds in my pocket if I could find out what I want, and what a friend of mine wants to know, as has been sneaking in the neighbourhood for the last two weeks, and dodging about in hopes of finding it. He's a long-headed chap, and could sell a horse as well as I could, and so deuced clever you might as well try to cheat an exciseman as him."

"I don't know him," said Angus, with a yawn.

"Who said you did? It's me as knows him, and it's me as has got to find out what he wants. Leastways, I hope to find it out, and don't mind trouble so long as I'm paid for it. Now, what I want is this—the chap will pay for it, mind that, and wont care for a pound or two extra, if you'll lend a hand. He's just come off a voyage, so he says—been out to the Western Ingies, and

on getting back, heard a something as started him off down here, where, as I told you, he has been dodging about, and meeting me one day in the fields, took a fancy to me, I suppose, and so you see——”

Here a loud snore informed him that his companion was asleep, as, with his head swung back, and his pipe falling from his mouth, Angus sat propped against the upright of the stile, deaf to the tempting offer of “the pound or two extra” the gipsy’s friend was willing to expend in exchange for something he was presumed to know, if he would only tell it.

And there was the identical friend coming along the right-hand meadow, in the direction of the stile, either out of patience with waiting, or coming to look after the gipsy.

On seeing him approach, and that Angus was fast asleep, the fellow first of all waved to his friend by way of caution not to come too near, then doubling his fist, he shook it in the sleeping man’s face—shook it with a threatening gesture, as much as to say he should like to knock the life out of him; then muttering to himself, he growled between his teeth—

“I’ll squeeze it out of you yet, and dig your heart out, but I’ll come at what I want. It’s Angus Macleod you are. That’s something to

get hold of, and if that chap yonder only dubs up well, I'll knock *you* on the head—if that's the job he wants—and double you up worse nor the saucepan as I said was so easy to kick into a smash. You only just keep what you know till I can squeeze it out, and if I don't make something of you, why your big head and my fist will come to a understanding. If that don't mark it, why a hedge-stake may, and more be got out of you nor old Daniel, which warn't much, and not over paying after all. I'll break it in, I tell you, so mind that; and when I smoke a pipe with you again, mind I don't give you a light, across the eyes, as will astonish you."

Having expressed his amiable intention in forcible, if not carefully selected words, he first of all looked to make sure that Angus was really asleep and not shamming, then walked away, and met his friend halfway across the meadow, who, to judge of him at a distance, appeared to be a burly-figured man, dressed in a drab great-coat and a Glengarry cap, but of more decent appearance than one would have thought it likely for the gipsy to be on such intimate terms with as he had professed himself to be.

There did not appear to be much said on either side, for the man seemed out of humour, and the

gipsy as savage as a bear. What little they said took place in the middle of the field, and before they turned off in opposite directions ; the gipsy breaking through a hedge into a copse, and the man in the drab great-coat going back the way he had come.

CHAPTER X.

A MESSAGE.

COMPELLED to be a witness to the meeting between Angus and the gipsy—forced to be a listener, and alarmed at the nature of their conversation—Margaret had been too much frightened at the time to think of anything but how to keep herself concealed. But now they were gone, and she had time to reflect on what she had heard, she became convinced there was a deeper meaning in the gipsy's words than he wished them to convey, and that he knew more of the injury inflicted on old Daniel than he chose to explain.

As to Angus, he was stupid or indifferent. He had either no perception, or was as dull and heavy as his companion was treacherous and cunning. *He* had had wit enough to read the other's character at a glance, and had not feared to tell him just as much as he thought safe, well knowing there was no fear of his detecting him ; and where with another he would have been as dumb as death, had not scrupled to talk of what he thought would lead to other matters, and coax Angus on to talk too.

Not he. He had listened to the tale with no more emotion than if he had been told that a snake had been battered, or a hedgehog killed. He had not even expressed his horror of the deed, but sat upon the stile unmoved and stolid; paid no attention to what the other said of the secret matter the man in the Glengarry cap was willing to pay handsomely for, and, indifferent to all things, kept smoking on; heard him talk of the hurt inflicted on old Daniel, and never for one moment seemed to think that the other had had a hand in it.

Once only he had been roused, or had shown any signs of excitement; and that was when the gipsy spoke of looking in at his window, or of having looked in, with a view perhaps to breaking in. The thought of any loss to be inflicted on his master had had more effect on him than if a hundred Daniels had been killed, or a hundred hedge-stakes had been used to batter in his brains.

As it was evident he was so dull, so stupid, and so callous, it became her to be doubly watchful, and to urge her husband to be watchful too; not only of the movements of the gipsy, but of that long-coated stranger she had seen in his company, whose hanging about the place could not be accidental, but had no doubt a

purpose in it ; or why had the gipsy spoken to Angus about money, and made it appear that it was his interest to do what he required ?

Her husband would be home the following day. There would be plenty of time to tell him when he returned what she had heard, when he could take necessary steps to insure the safety of his property, and forbid Angus to talk with strangers.

That night at least there was no alarm, although she had half expected it. Angus held his watch in vain, and was never once disturbed by the black-muzzled gipsy looking in at his window, nor indeed by anything.

He was wide awake the next day though, when one of the servants came running to tell him that an outhouse had been broken open, and a variety of articles carried off. This made him wild and furious ; and as his master was always his first consideration, he swore to be revenged, and spoke of what he meant to do if he caught the scoundrel trying it again.

A fowl or two might have been stolen. He did not so much mind that ; but a forcible entry to an outhouse struck him as being rather too bad. They might venture to attack the house itself next ; but if they did, he had thought of something which might make it rather dangerous, and teach them not to do it again.

His first object was to arm himself, but as he had no weapon at hand to suit his purpose, he sharpened a bill-hook, and having fastened it to the end of a stout staff, he went off to his room, and swore that if anyone ventured to climb up to his window, or attempted to break into the house, he would chop him down, and make him pay for peeping.

To make his intention fully understood, and let it get known about the neighbourhood that he was ready to pay off all trespassers, he marched about the fields, and made occasional cuts at overhanging branches to show how easily he could lop them off, and be prepared to welcome a marauder who might think it worth his while to try its edge, and come within its sweep.

Let his master do what he liked—give what he liked, and feast the whole camp of them with his choicest and his best, that was his business; but while he was away, and Angus was left in charge, not a gipsy of them all should lay his thievish hand on anything if he could prevent it.

Satisfied with the precautions he had taken, and anxious to serve his master to the best of his ability, he waited patiently for what was to come. But the sight of that horrible weapon filled Margaret with dismay; and knowing what

he would do if compelled to use it, and that at a single blow of that terrible axe he could cut off a branch or cleave down a man, she dreaded him more than ever; and, shuddering if she saw him walking about with it, felt inclined to tell him to throw it away, only she knew it would be useless.

At night her fear increased. She could not rest for thinking of it, but creeping out of bed stole into the old bay-windowed room to be certain of what he was doing, and if he had that dreaded bill-hook on his shoulder as he kept pacing up and down the outside room, or rested with it by his side.

She could not see him at first; but as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she saw a something move, and after a while observed him lying in wait under the evergreens, ready to spring on anyone who came near his master's house, or trespassed where he had no right.

The whole night long she sat in dread of something dreadful happening, and knowing that he was on the watch and skulking in a corner, or stalking like a shadow of death about the place, she did not dare to go to bed, but, sitting at the window, fancied she heard a death-like struggle, then a groan, and in every whisper of the night the fearful utterance of some dying man.

But when the morning came, and Angus was seen as usual lounging about, or walking in the grounds, she hoped to find the axe laid by and hid away till night. No ; he had it still upon his shoulder, or, holding it in his hand, kept poising it as if for a downward cut, and to show how well he understood its use.

It was too horrible to think about, and, pale as death from terror and excitement, no wonder her husband was alarmed at seeing her, and, though he questioned her as to the cause, she had not courage to confess the truth, but foolishly invented all excuses but the right one : never said a word of Angus and his threat to be revenged on the gipsy or his companion should they do anything he disliked, or make too free with his master's property : never even informed him of the conversation she had overheard, for fear of disturbing him so soon after his return, but, keeping to herself the knowledge she had gained, deprived him of the means of hunting out the long-skirted stranger and his comrade, and of ascertaining why they met or lay in wait for Angus.

She had no especial reason for not telling him. She only thought to spare him trouble and annoyance at that particular time ; but in the morning she fully made up her mind to acquaint

him with all she knew, and inform him of what she had overheard. By withholding the information she had obtained, and not acquainting him with her suspicions regarding the gipsy and his murderous attack upon old Daniel, she left him unprepared for the intelligence he received next day of the old man having been nearly killed and left for dead, after he had watched him sitting by the camp fire, and after he had seen a stealthy form creep from the tent and follow him, as he presumed, towards the hedge.

The first intimation he received of anything being wrong was brought him by one of his servants, who came to say that a little ragged boy having been found hanging about the place, and looking for what he could steal, he had been questioned as to what he wanted, when he said that he had been sent by his grandfather Daniel to tell the squire that he wished to see him, and that if he did not come soon he would be too late, for he was very bad, and not expected to live the night.

It also appeared that the boy had been beaten, as his story was not believed; but as he still stuck to it, and said he dared not go back without seeing the squire, the servants thought it might be as well if their master saw the boy, when he could cross-question him, and

perhaps get at the truth of his story, though they could not.

If that boy spoke truth, not a moment was to be lost, as no doubt the old man had something to impart he had not dared to trust to him before ; but, now that he was dying, wished to explain more fully—to tell him, perhaps, more about his brother than he yet knew, and satisfy him on certain particulars respecting his joining the tribe, and of his afterdoings during the time he remained with them.

But on seeing the boy and questioning him, he could gather nothing further than what he had been told, though he persisted in declaring that his grandfather wanted to see him that very night, and in the old green lane where they had met before.

The boy knew nothing of what his grandfather wanted, but had been told to come, and wished he hadn't, to get knocked about, "all along of doing what he had been told to do." But as Ellerton scolded the servants for ill-using him, gave him money, and ordered him a good meal, the little urchin looked more contented, though he still rubbed his shoulder, and, complaining that he had been used badly, made believe too he was a great deal more hurt than he really was.

Having eaten his fill, and been abused by the housekeeper for a dirty little vagabond, and searched to see if he had stolen anything, the boy was suffered to go about his business, overjoyed at his escape, and glad to get out of the place in a whole skin.

But he was not yet out of trouble, nor so well off as he expected; for on making a short cut from the house, and hiding the money Ellerton had given him in a snug corner of his pocket, he had the misfortune to encounter Angus, who, catching hold of his collar, first shook him, then steadied him, and, under a threat of a good thrashing if he ever caught him near the place again, entrusted him with a message which he said he was faithfully to deliver, unless he wanted his bones broken the next time he caught him.

“Here, you young chor,” cried Angus, giving him another shake, “you’ve had your habben^a and your blaw,^b and eaten your bellyful, though it’s my belief you would have enjoyed it better if you had had a chance of swallowing it a mile or two away. That’s not what I’ve got to say, but only this; so mind you keep your mooie^c close, and don’t open it till you get back to your tents again.”

The boy stared at him, and, finding him so

^a Bread.

^b Meat.

^c Mouth.

skilled in gipsy cant, kept a dogged silence, though he looked sulkily about, and betrayed an anxiety to begone before being further questioned, or compelled to answer in a language he was taught on all occasions to conceal from strangers.

“Look you, my praw;^a if your lears^b ain’t long enough to hear what I say, I may find a way to pull them out a bit, and put you in the way of earning a curdie if you do what I tell you. Oh, you need not open your yaks^c and make believe you don’t understand me. You know well enough what I say, and if you don’t make up your mind to it, and quickly too, I’ll duck you in the horsepond, and treat you to more water than you have had for a twelve-month.”

“What do you want? I ain’t going to run away, and don’t mean to. It’s grandfather as wants the gentleman, not me, and sent me to know if he would come.”

“That’s likely enough, but some one else may be a wanting you to know if you have stolen anything, and if it’s into his big pocket it’s to go when he meets you outside the wood. Him with the neckhandkercher twisted round his carlie,^d and a pair of boots on his feet as was never made for him. Him with a black mop of

^a Boy.

^b Ears.

^c Eyes.

^d Neck.

hair on his skerro,^a and his face the colour of a rum puncheon.”

The boy nodded as much as to say he knew the person whose appearance Angus so flatteringly described, then screwing his neck, and struggling to get loose, he looked anything but pleased at the pains taken to convince him of his acquaintance with a friend in whose company he took unusual interest.

“Well then, you just say that I have heard what he did the other night, and that if he wants to try that game again he had better wear a peerie^b on his head, or bing-la-me^c if I don’t bring this down upon it and slice his lears off for coming where he has no right. You tell him this, will you, and say that I have taken a fancy to walk about at night with this bill-hook on my shoulder, so that there may be no mistake about it, and he can’t say he was taken unawares if I happen to shave his ill-looking face a little cleaner than usual.”

“Oh, I’ll tell him,” said the boy. “Only don’t you go for to stick your knuckles in my neck no more, ’cos I wont stand it, mind that.”

“Oh, you wont, wont you?” replied Angus, wringing his neck still harder. “You’re a sharp lad, my chauvie; and I shouldn’t wonder if some

^a Head.

^b Pot.

^c Devil miss me.

of these days you'll feel your neck held tighter yet, and lifted higher than you like ; so a little twisting beforehand wont do no harm, but get you used to it."

But the boy did not want to get used to it. Giving a sudden jerk, and slipping his arms out of his jacket, he ran off like lightning, and never looked back until he had reached a safe distance, when, sticking his hands into his sides and after laughing till he could hardly stand, he bounded off, and on gaining the outskirts of the wood met the low-browed gipsy Angus had described, and at the very spot where he said he would be lying in wait to catch him on his way home.

On being informed of the message, and what Angus meant to do if he caught him, the fellow swore a dreadful oath, and grinding his teeth, snarled something between them when he heard of the promised shaving, then cursing Angus and shaking his fist, looked as if he longed to have the chance of making his face as intimately acquainted with his knuckles as he had threatened he would.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SANDS RUN OUT.

IT was getting dark ; and as Ellerton had arranged to go to old Daniel as soon as the night set in, he called to Angus to accompany him, not wishing, as he said, to fall into a trap in case certain of the tribe had invented the story told by the boy that his grandfather wished to see him in order to get him in their power and rob him. Personally, he had no fear ; but as tales of their violence were not unfrequent he thought that two would have a better chance than one, and that his man and himself would be more than a match for half a dozen of those louting, idle vagabonds, who seldom proceeded to extremities unless the odds were considerably in their favour.

Tormented with the thought of his brother, and impatient to know why the old man had sent for him, and if indeed he had something further to communicate than he had already told him, he set out at a smart pace, and once through the wood, and over the rail leading to the road, kept forward with a hurried step until he came

upon the green lane branching to the left, and turning into it, recalled the difficulty he had had in tracing his way before, and when, but for Angus he would have given up his search as useless.

They were close upon the entrance of the further of the two lanes now, and where, turning out from the direct line, the second lane branched to the right, leading, as he had formerly supposed, either to a farmhouse or a copse.

It was but little used ; at least, as far as he could perceive, for the grass grew half-way over the sides, and the few traces of wheels barely left an impression in the sward, though in parts it was cut into deep ruts, and became swampy to the tread from unseen springs, or by holding the water, as in a sponge, before letting it off in small rills intersecting the roadway.

A little further on, and he observed the angle in the lane whence he had formerly caught sight of the watch-fire and old Daniel sitting by it, and calling to Angus—who till now had been slouching at his heels, shouldering his bill-hook, and enjoying to the full the sight of the hedge-rows, and the deep gloom which on all sides lay thick and heavy,—told him to go before and watch how matters stood, so that if he saw any signs of treachery, he might receive timely notice and be on his guard to face it. In the meantime he

was to approach as cautiously as possible, and in the event of not seeing anything suspicious, to make his master a sign to that effect, and then draw back so as not to be seen by the group of men and women that by this time he could see in the distance, gathered about the fire.

Swinging along, and utterly indifferent to danger or deceit on the part of the dusky tribe he was sent to watch, Angus kept on his way, and after looking for a while to satisfy his master that all was right, he beckoned to him to come on, and pointed to a group of men and women congregated about the fire, and standing round some object lying on the ground, but what it was, he could not make out.

It was now Ellerton's turn to advance, and telling his man to be cautious and not show himself unless he called, he soon became convinced that something of more than ordinary interest had caused that group to gather round a particular object, and then felt confident that it could be no other than old Daniel stretched upon his bed of straw, and awaiting the death he had sent to tell him was so soon to come.

A breathless calm hung on the place. The very air was hushed, and the low sobbing of a weeping woman fell on his ear so distinctly, it appeared as if the calm preceding death was shared

by all surrounding objects ; leaving that woman's sobbing to be heard heralding the closing of a mortal's life, and the last closing of his dim, sad eyes.

So still, so calm, they all appeared ; the men and women mournfully attentive to the object stretched before them, and the very children cautiously stirring in and out, or peeping awestruck, to take a last long look at the old man's face, wrinkled and worn, and drawn and puckered ; as the fitful gasps first came, then went, or left his face a blank, and still as stone—he watched awhile in silence.

The very dogs slunk away, or hung their heads, and moved about in presence of that dreaded something, as if they knew its import, little as their instincts could direct them to the knowledge of the fact itself. They neither barked nor whined, but poking their noses between their masters' legs, adding to the number of the group, and seeming to take a part in what it did and saw. All but one cur, a wiry-haired, crop-eared, and vicious-looking cur, that suddenly setting up the sharp points of its ears, began to snarl and show its teeth, then, running out, barked sharply and furiously, and would have flown at Ellerton, had not the same boy who had brought the message kicked it on one side, and pointing to where

his grandfather lay, told him "to make no noise, as the old man was nearly gone, and couldn't last much longer though they tried," then leading him towards the group, he said something in a whisper to his comrades, and left him to do as he pleased.

Differently disposed about the dying man—some looking down at him, others squatting on the ground and watching him as he lay, while one or two assisted his daughter to hold him up, or place his head more comfortably in her lap—all mutely watching or attentive to his wants, stolid yet kind, and though seemingly callous, not the less impressed by what they saw.

Touched by the solemnity of the scene, by the wildness of the scenery, and the rough though kindly sympathy he saw in young and old, Ellerton approached and found no difficulty in getting admitted into the group; for on seeing him one or two of the men made way for him to pass, then drawing off to talk among themselves, began to wonder what the old man could want with the riah, that he had sent for to come, and didn't seem able to die until he saw him.

The woman shook her head when he spoke to her and whispered his fears that he was dead, then listening for the feeble respiration that she knew would come, she moistened his parched lips, and said she would do her best to let her father

know that the gentleman had come, though she feared it would be too late to be of any good.

She tried again and again ; whispered low and softly in his ear, but losing heart, began to apprehend his last hour had indeed come, and that all attempts to rouse him would be made in vain.

Yet not to give it over in despair, she spoke again, and again with no better effect, when suddenly, and as if a galvanic battery had been applied, he partly raised himself, unclosed his eyes, and seeing Ellerton, bent them on him with a glassy stare, wishing, yet vainly trying to make him comprehend that he had something to say to him if he could only gather strength to last a little longer. Then raising his arm and waving it with a trembling motion, he seemed as though he wished the others to retire and leave him alone with the gentleman whom he had sent for to say something to him they must not hear, as it was intended for his ear alone.

Appearing to understand his wish, and drawing a little on one side, the watchers by his bed-side gradually drew off and left the old man still resting on his daughter's knee, with no one but herself and Ellerton to catch his dying words—if indeed he had strength to utter them, or could be brought to remember

what he had to say, and why he had sent for him to come to him in the old green lanes on that particular night.

Turning uneasily on his bed, and sucking down a few drops of cordial his daughter dripped into his mouth, the dying gipsy lifted his head languidly, then drooping it on his daughter's knee, he raised his eyes to Ellerton and said—

“It was wrong of me not to tell you at the first, but you see I let it be, thinking to have a better chance some day, and a better time to tell it in. That time has come, and that's the reason why I sent for you.”

Speaking in a hoarse, low whisper, broken at times by want of breath, and difficult to be understood from his extreme faintness, Ellerton began to fear, that though the old man might still retain the inclination, that he wanted the power to articulate, or to speak to him as plainly as he wished. Kneeling by his side, and assisting the woman with her helpless burthen, he prepared to hear the old man speak again, or see him die.

“It was not quite a proper thing of me to do,” said the old gipsy, speaking once again, and looking fixedly at Ellerton, “to be a party to his running away, and leaving his poor old father broken by his loss. But that's all over now. He paid for his fault, and I must pay for mine.

But then you see he liked to have his way, and had it too, and died, as I told you on before, and where he was buried, if I don't mistake."

Wishing to make the conversation brief as possible, and to spare the old man unnecessary exertion, Ellerton nodded to assure him that he knew all about that, but wished him to explain what he did not know ; though he began to fear it was too late, for the gipsy grew weaker every moment, and every time he paused he had to be refreshed by a few drops of cordial to keep him to the point.

"I told you, unless I forget, how Arthur used to go away at times, and then come back to see old Daniel and his dead and gone missus—dead these twenty years nor more, and the little kinchiu dead and gone as well, and waiting for poor old father to join 'em up above."

"But Arthur," whispered Ellerton, as he saw the old man close his eyes as if going into his last sleep.

"Oh ! ay, ay ! Arthur it was—him as used to come back at times, and get precious scolded by Nan for bolting off and leaving us as he left his father. I ought to have told you all about it before, but didn't, when you and me sat by the fire, and had a talk of old times, when Daniel was a likely man enough, and not so weak as he is now."

“And that night sitting by the fire——”

“Oh! Ay—that’s it sure enough. Well, as I said, I should have told you on it then, but didn’t; and that’s the reason maybe why I was knocked on the head soon arter, and left for dead, with my head gashed open so that you might have laid your hand in it almost.”

“Your head cut open!”

“Well nigh split in two. You know you give me a sovereign; and it is my belief some one as seed you give it, followed me in the dark, and knocked me down to rob me of it.”

“But who—who would have attempted to murder a poor old man for the sake of such a trifle?” said Ellerton, remembering the figure he had seen steal out of the tent, and follow Daniel in the darkness.

“Bless you, there are dozens as would do it for less than half as much if they only had a chance,” replied the old man, evasively; not wishing to mention the person he thought had injured him.

“But is there no one you suspect?”

“Hush!” whispered the old man, even more softly than before. “It’s not old Daniel as would split upon him, although I think I could lay my hand upon him, and tell his name, if I had a mind. But then you see gipsies should

be true to one another and not tell tales ; though this one did well nigh murder me, and robbed me of my old leather pouch in which I kept what little I got, and what was more nor that, took in it a something else, which if I forgot to tell you on, please call it to my mind, for I ain't over certain what I talk about just now."

" But Arthur, when he came back to you——"

" That's it—that's what I want to say—that's why I sent for you, because you see, you wished to know all about him, and if he was ever married."

" Married !"

" Yes he was. But not to one of my people. Not to a gipsy, or maybe he had been better off. It was some one else as he married. A wild, bad tempered woman. But handsome and good looking ; as made eyes at him I suppose, and talked him over, like a fool as he was, to marry her."

" And this woman——"

" Led him the devil's own life, so that one day when we was out in the north, he comes not only back himself, but brings a child with him."

" A child !"

" A fine strong brat of a boy, of three years old nor more, and leaves him with us to take care of, 'cos he said his mother wouldn't, but had

fallen into all kinds of mischief, and was as bad a slut as ever spoiled a pot of broth, and worried a man out of his life."

"And this child—this boy? Did you keep him with you?"

"For a few years, and past beyond the time we carried Arthur on our shoulders and buried him out in Yorkshire, or somewhere thereabouts, I can't just say where. It was after that a woman come to ask for him one day, as said she was his wife. A fine, strapping, black-eyed woman, but as great a spit-cat as you ever see."

"And did she claim the child?"

"Claimed him, and took him away with her, when she found Arthur was dead; which was a pity, for he was a fine-grown, gipsy-looking lad, and would have lived with Daniel all his life, if she hadn't come. But it warn't to be; the gipsy ain't no use now, and there's the tent that's waiting for him to go into spread above him in the skies, and the beenlightment shut out by its fold."

As if the daylight of which he spoke had ceased to be—that the pall lowered from the skies had wrapped him in its misty shroud, and that the invisible hand of time had let the curtain drop upon an ended life—the old man closed his eyes, and sinking in his daughter's arms, appeared

to fade and droop away, and his spirit to pass into the world to come.

Impressed by the sight of impending death, and watching for it to come, Ellerton noticed the glazing eyes grow dim and dimmer; then anxious to know about the pouch and its contents, he would have spoken, but seeing, as he thought, the hand of death laid on that whitened face, he felt it was too late!—that the knowledge of what it contained died with the gipsy, and that any attempt to discover it would be unavailing.

Making a last effort to rouse him, he stooped, and whispering in the old man's ear, he said—

“The pouch! the pouch!”

The jaw opened—fell—then closed! while through his parted lips the old man said, almost inaudibly—

“Certificate of marriage. Register of birth—and——”

There was no more heard. The jaw dropped for the last time, and Daniel was dead.

All now was over. The dead man lay stretched upon the ground, and feeling the impropriety of remaining, as he might be interfering with what they had to do, or be looked upon as an intruder if he stayed, Ellerton spoke kindly to the woman, and giving her money, was assuring her of his desire to serve her at some

future time—when he observed a figure crouching behind the woman, sufficiently close to overhear what they had been talking of, but so carefully concealed, it was only by an accident that he had been discovered.

Starting, and annoyed on observing the man in the act of listening, he was about to question him sharply when the fellow slunk back, and resting against one of the uprights of a tent, stood staring at him, as if to let him understand he knew more than he thought, and that his secret was not so safe as he supposed, although he had been at so much pains to conceal it.

But on the old man's body being carried past the tent and removed to a place of safety, he observed the man shrink back, shudder when he saw the upturned face, and the yet unhealed gash ploughing his forehead, then drawing further off, and stealing behind the shadow of another tent, still look towards him, but with a face as white as chalk.

Half hidden by the awning of the tent, standing behind the man, and regarding him with a look of intense ferocity, stood another man, grasping an upraised bill-hook in his hands, and only waiting his master's signal to hew him down.

CHAPTER XII.

COGITATIONS.

His brother had been married then. He had had a son, and the intelligence coming upon him so suddenly, and when he had expected only to be informed of certain particulars respecting his mode of life, and the reason of his remaining so long away, it alarmed him more than he wished to own, and filled his mind with speculations as to what had become of that son, and if he were still alive.

There was no possible reason to doubt the truth of what he had heard, and as old Daniel had sent for him only at the last moment, when he was dying, and at his last gasp, he began to think that the old man must have had some powerful motive for informing him, and might perhaps be aware of an intention on the part of those acquainted with the secret of the lad's birth to bring him forward.

Look at it which way he would, he was equally distracted. His brother's object in keeping himself and son so long concealed must have had a motive, or perhaps he had determined on

returning to his home and had taken his son with him, with the double intention of removing him from his mother, and of restoring him to his proper position, when he fell sick and died. Left in the care of Daniel, the secret of that boy's birth might have been safe. It probably remained so still. Arthur's wife did not appear to have been acquainted with her husband's real name and condition, and unless some one had taken the pains to inform her of them after his death, the secret might yet be preserved, and his fears have no foundation.

Daniel only knew that the boy had been taken away. He did not seem to be aware with what object, nor what had become of him; and as he had every reason to wish to conceal the share he had had in tempting her husband to leave his home, it was not likely he would have gone out of his way to enlighten the woman as to her son's name and expectations, as he appeared to have disliked, and afterwards lost sight of her.

But if he had been induced to declare to her the much-dreaded information, or if some member of the tribe had taken it into his head from interested motives to acquaint her with it, it made little difference. His position was as uncertain as before, and it behoved him to look the difficulty in the face and prevent, as far as

lay in his power, the possibility of the much-dreaded discovery taking place.

The marriage certificate (could it be obtained) might furnish a clue to the wife's name, and perhaps discover her whereabouts—not that he desired it. But the certificate of birth was the important document, and would prevent the chance of imposition, and of some person palming himself upon him as his nephew who had no title to his name. Both documents had been stolen. They had been carried off in the old man's pouch; and though it might be that he had been plundered of it by some one unacquainted with its contents, and for the sake of what he could steal—it was at the same time quite possible that they might have fallen into the hands of one who could appreciate their value, and use them as a means to ruin him by producing that long-lost son as heir to his father's property.

Do what he would, and turn it over as he might, the same fear awaited him, and shrinking from the startling intelligence he had just received, he endeavoured to relieve his mind by dwelling on the improbability of such an event occurring, or of the disreputable connexion his brother had formed being known, so as to interfere with his peaceable possession of what he had hitherto conceived himself justly entitled to.

And then again he thought of Margaret, and, remembering how confidently he had assured her of his brother's death, and of his unquestioned right to succeed in his stead, he grew nervous and uneasy, fearing she might imagine he had deceived her, or that he had assumed a right he did not possess. Should that boy at any time come forward, and assert his right to his grandfather's property, she might, and with some reason, turn round on him, and say that he had wilfully imposed on her credulity ; placed her in a false position simply to gratify his vanity, and then left her to take the consequences of his falsehood.

For her sake, far more than for his own, he dwelt on the unwelcome news, and thought how she might bear the shock ;—hear that at any time they might be turned out to make room for some one else, and see the chief of their possessions snatched from them by that vagabond son his wilful brother had left to fight his way up in the world, or find his birthright out the best way he could. Would she be so easily convinced that he was blameless in the matter, or accuse him of neglect in not discovering beforehand what was likely to take place, and that the estate he boasted of belonged rightfully to another, for whom he was nursing it and

keeping it, not as its master, but its master's servant.

But no! that was impossible. Margaret was too disinterested for that. She would see his father's land go from him without regret; love him better for his reverses, and prove her woman's nature by clinging to him the more fondly because he was unfortunate, and made to suffer, for no fault of his own, but through the force of circumstances. She would never blame him for what he could not avoid, but would see that low-born son of a worthless mother inherit, what she had hoped to see her son inherit without regret, and, by a steadfastness of purpose, convince him she had not married him for his wealth alone, but for something better than wealth—a noble nature and a manly heart.

Reasoning with himself, and striving to convince himself there was no likelihood of such a chance befalling him, he fell into a train of thought of what that nephew was like, and if he were alive or dead. If dead, why then all claim died with him, for of the mother he had no fear. If living, then to fancy that he was some rude, unpolished lout, insensible to the charms of wealth, indifferent to its pleasures, and only conscious of a brutish sense of ease, which a small sum would purchase, and give him the

comfort he desired. Or some wretched, care-worn man, a cast-off from the world, and no more appreciative of civilized society than Angus was, who tramping at his heels followed his master with obedient steps.

Busied with the thought of Daniel, reflecting on his dying words, and cogitating on a thousand topics, all hinging and bearing on the one engrossing subject uppermost in his mind, Ellerton passed out of the wood, and on getting near the stile where Margaret had heard the conversation between Angus and the gipsy, he saw two figures cross over the grass, strike into the right hand avoid pathway, and walk away as if wishing to him.

He called and demanded their business; but as the men made no reply, and Ellerton saw that the louder he called the quicker they walked, he was about following them, when Angus, in a half whisper, said to him—

“That’s the chap as I see here once before. Him with the neckercher about his throat, and a big stick swinging in his hand. You may know him easily by the way he straddles his legs, and walks along as if he had a right to the place. It’s him as I kept my eye on when you was up at the tents just now, and did not see him, perhaps, as he crawled near the old man and

tried to catch something as he said. I saw him fast enough, though ; I know his face of old, and ain't likely to forget it either, as he'll find out to his cost some day if he don't mind what he's about."

" But the other one ?" said Ellerton, after he had recalled the gipsy's stealthy movement and the look he had fixed upon him when old Daniel expired in his daughter's arms. " Who is he, and what business have they trespassing at a time of night like this ?"

" As to that other one, he's new to me, and is most likely a pal of that fellow as begged a light of me, and a screw of tobacco to fill his pipe. It's my opinion they ain't after no good, master, and that's the reason why I walk about with this upon my shoulder ; and that black-muzzled fellow seems to know it too, and may taste its edge if he comes poking his nose where he has no right to."

" But how did they get here before us ? We came by the shortest way, and lost no time in coming."

" Oh, easy. Them long-legged gipsies ain't particular how they get along, but make straight to a point, do you see, and get over the ground in no time. Not like a nigger ; he always goes by a roundabout way, and, ten chances to one,

comes out at the wrong place after all. But then, you see, a nigger ain't got no brains in his head, whereas a gipsy has, and knows more dodges than a fox.

As Ellerton thought that, in all probability, the men he had seen were a couple of the tribe looking out for what they could lay their hands upon, he took no further notice, but quietly determined to put a stop to their depredations for the future. While Daniel lived there was an old association connecting him—however displeasingly—with his father and his brother, but now he was dead all feeling of the past died with him, and left him at liberty to do as he desired.

Margaret, he was aware, would be expecting him, anxious to hear the result of his interview with Daniel, and the secret he had to tell him. But Ellerton did not wish to inform her of what he knew respecting his brother's marriage, and of his having had a son, for fear of exciting in her those very apprehensions he was troubled with himself, and thought, by keeping back the information, to leave her in ignorance of what had really happened—to put her off by an imaginary tale respecting his brother, enough to satisfy her curiosity, yet keep her in the dark on the more important point involved in the gipsy's

confession, so that no needless apprehension might arise to occasion uneasiness as to the stability of her present fortunes before the time had come to question it.

Actuated by this double feeling of secretiveness and regard to his wife, he told her just as much as he thought proper, but carefully withheld the more important matters confided to him by the dying gipsy ; and as she was satisfied with what he told her, and had no particular curiosity to gratify, Ellerton had little difficulty in framing a tale suited to his purpose, and to explain the reason of Daniel's sending for him.

Delighted to find his wife so amiable and so easily satisfied, he congratulated himself that she at least was not of a suspicious nature, but that whatever he chose to tell her she would believe and accept as a truth.

The unusual change in her manner, if it had no other effect, convinced him that she trusted him and relied on him ; and as trust and confidence lead surely, though slowly, up to love, he took better heart ; fancied he saw it beaming in her eye, or detected it in her smile, and resolved to throw off some portion of his watchfulness ; to lay aside his doubts, and trust in her implicitly, now the turning point in her affection had been gained, and he had some reason to expect that she

would soon love him as devotedly as he loved her.

Yet in the midst of all this new-born confidence, this burst of kindliness, and this absence from suspicion, he withheld from her the very facts on which his happiness chiefly depended. He trusted just as much as he thought it wise to trust, yet boasted of his unbounded faith; spoke of his love for her, and by making it appear that his suspicious nature had all at once grown frank, flattered her that she, and she alone, possessed his confidence, at the very time that he withheld it and distrusted her, notwithstanding his professions to the contrary.

By this over-caution, this want of confidence in his wife, he was left in ignorance of what it concerned him most to know, and of which he would have heard had he but confided to her what he had seen and heard himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONFIDENCE NOT ALWAYS SAFE.

THAT Ellerton had been painfully excited on hearing that his brother had left a son, may be easily imagined. He became restless and impatient, looked on everyone with suspicion, and if ever he ventured into the town, he glanced uneasily about, as if he feared to be accosted by some one interested in that son, come to look after his rights, and, if necessary, to enforce them.

But as old Daniel had been dead for several weeks, and no one came, or wrote, he grew more easy; and as no reference was ever made to his father or his brother, he endeavoured to convince himself that his fears were more imaginary than real, and that the chances of his brother's son ever appearing were so remote he could with confidence afford to wait, and not indulge in useless speculations as to what might happen should that son at any future time become acquainted with the all-important secret of his father's name, and the right he inherited through him.

Sometimes in his dreams, indeed, they came—

his father, his brother, and his nephew—and so distinctly seen, he could have sworn they had been present at his bedside when he woke, and pointing to him as he lay, as if in mockery. His father as he remembered to have seen him in his youth; his brother like his portrait; and his son——

But he could not see *his* face, or, if he saw it, saw it through a mist. A waving shade appeared to hang between his face and him, and hide it from him, eagerly as he thought he glanced, in hopes to make him out, and discover what he was like.

The only reason he had for knowing him at all, or for supposing he was his nephew, was by his brother's holding him by the hand, and pointing to him, as if to show he was his son, and to convince him that he was an object of especial interest by the tender care he seemed to have of him.

What struck him as being singular, and invested his dream with a strange reality, was the peculiar smile upon his father's face when he looked at them, as if to let him know his fondness for the elder brother descended to his son, and shut him out from the least token of regard. He would march round the bed with them, point to them, then stop to look at him and smile, when all three vanished. The son the last to

disappear, and always lingering as if to let him know that he was the last of his race, and not so soon got rid of as he supposed.

He never told his wife of this. Why should he distress her by foolish fancies pictured in his dreams, and drawn together from a crowd of waking thoughts! No, he would keep such matters to himself; leave her to pass her time in innocent amusements—in reading, music, and the thousand and one employments women so readily avail themselves of to make the dulllest day pass pleasantly.

He had done wiser had he trusted her. He would at least have secured a companion in his doubts, a sharer in his surmises as to the purport of these dreams, and if they really were to be regarded as portending trouble, or to be looked upon as the result of an over-excited imagination; and from constantly brooding in secret over that brother's loss, or of his son's being alive and able to prove himself the legal successor to the Ellerton estate.

Had he been able to read her character rightly, he would have taken less pains to withhold his confidence, and informed her of what had really happened. But wise as he thought himself, and skilled in reading character, he made a sad mistake in Margaret's. Had he

trusted her, thrown off his restraint, and led her to believe he entirely confided in her, he might have won her to regard him with an equal trust, and, as a matter of principle and justice, to do everything in her power to deserve the faith he reposed in her.

Instead of which, the secret doubt she saw he entertained of her, excited in her breast the very opposite feeling to the one he wished to create ; making her fall back on old regrets, old loves, old memories, and, by contrasting him with Frederick, placed him in so unfavourable a light that she wondered she could ever have consented to her mother's wishes, and given up her own desires to pass her life with him.

He had no friends, and never appeared to wish for any ; and, though several of his father's old friends called on them, it was easy to perceive that he felt disinclined to receive their visits, and, that averse to all association, he preferred their quiet way of life to a more extended, and as he would sometimes say, hollow friendship with people he despised.

Margaret had her own thinkings on the subject, and though her husband never by the slightest sign or word made it appear he wished to debar her from innocent amusements, he, at the same time, professed his own contentment in

seclusion so repeatedly, and dwelt upon the folly and uselessness of fashionable amusements so unceasingly, she thought she detected a meaning in his constantly expressed dislike, and conceived that by the preference he showed towards their present mode of life, he wished her to think as he did, and to be equally satisfied with seclusion from society as himself.

It sometimes occurred to her that this dislike to society arose, not so much from a positive distrust of her, as from a wish to keep her to himself, and to prevent the possibility of her bestowing her affections elsewhere. There was a touch of jealous caution so painfully apparent in his anxiety to debar her the freedom usually enjoyed by her sex, she could not help recalling the character given of him by her father, and the faithfulness of his description when he dwelt on his doubting and suspicious nature.

But then her father spoke of his confidence and trust, and that he never doubted without a reason. His present conduct did not agree with this. It rather exhibited a morbid sensibility; a jealousy, and a desire to doubt before distrust was necessary, and to suspect where there was no occasion for suspicion; inducing her to regard him with a strange, uncomfortable feeling, and make her more discontented with her match than ever.

True, he never openly thwarted her inclinations, or gave her the opportunity for positive complaint ; but let her see his objection more by his manner than his words. He indulged her, humoured her, and would do anything to contribute to her happiness, provided her happiness lay in the same direction as his own ; otherwise it was useless to contend for it. She was sure to be met with some excuse, a sullenness on his part which effectually prevented her expressing a desire for anything she thought likely to promote her happiness, and make her more contented, if he had only let her.

He had taken a fancy to farming lately ; and, in keeping with his energetic character, set to work with a will, and left nothing undone he thought he could accomplish by pains and perseverance. He superintended everything ; looked after everything ; and as he fancied nothing could be properly done he did not do himself, he devoted himself to the task he had in hand unceasingly ; and, always at his post, seldom returned till after the labourers had left off work, and in time for a late dinner.

One day, while the improvements he was planning on a distant part of his estate were being actively carried on, he took it into his head that he would go home before his usual time, and sur-

prise his wife by returning when she did not expect him ; and as the labourers were busy at rough work, in filling ditches, and levelling hedges, he called to Angus, and telling him what to do, left the men under his charge, with an intimation that he should soon return ; then started off on his return home.

The direct way to the house lay by the meadows, along the ornamental walk, and through the pleasure-grounds facing the windows of the drawing-room where Margaret usually sat, and where she could see him if she chanced to be looking out, and he prepared beforehand for his coming. This wasn't what he wished. He wanted to surprise her, and, on leaving Angus, he walked for a short distance as if with the intention of going by the ordinary way, but as soon as he was out of sight, he struck off to the left, and taking a pathway that he knew would lead him by a roundabout way to the side entrance, he availed himself of the nature of the ground, and the thick growth of underwood, to mask his approach, and prevent his being observed.

Stopping as soon as he thought himself near enough, and peeping through a hedge, he was glad to find that the gardeners had left off work, that the servants were indoors, and not a soul, as far as he could see, in any direction. Now

was the time: and as he had taken a fancy to surprise his wife, he felt he could not have a better opportunity, and creeping softly across the lawn, chuckled when he thought how capitally he had managed it, and how Margaret would be astonished on beholding him.

Yet not to throw away a chance, and in case any of the servants might unexpectedly look out and tell his wife he was coming, he passed through the shrubbery, and seeing the coast clear, stole on tiptoe to the house, and entered it.

He had acted in this, as in most other matters, from no bad motive, but with his usual caution. He had no suspicion just then operating in his mind, and no doubt of his wife to be confirmed or dissipated; but he could not for the life of him do anything openly when it could be done secretly; and where an ordinary man would have walked up boldly to the house, he preferred to approach it cautiously, and take his wife so completely by surprise, there could be no opportunity of putting anything away, or of hiding it from his notice.

His pleasure might be the pleasure of a boy in doing something he thought sly and clever; yet as the design was harmless, and his object simply one of personal gratification, there was nothing to find fault with, though he had done

better had he observed less caution, and been a little more open in his movements.

Margaret was no doubt in the drawing-room. She generally sat there when alone—unless, indeed, she had stolen into the old deserted room to gratify her love of solitude. But as she seldom sat there now, since he had told her not to do so, the chances were he should find her working or reading in the drawing-room, and unprepared to see him home so soon.

Afraid lest she should hear his step upon the stairs, and do away with the surprise he intended, he crept along as noiselessly as possible, and on reaching the landing, saw her lap-dog on the rug outside the door, asleep and curled up like a ball of silk.

By the dog being there, he knew that Margaret was in the room. Gently turning the handle, he looked inside, and saw his wife sitting at a table engaged in sewing, or in sorting a variety of articles laid upon it.

Holding the door ajar, and peeping, preparatory to stepping into the room and catching her in his arms, and laughing at her for being taken unawares, he first of all looked carefully about, and as she sat with her back towards him, observed her gazing at something she held in her hand, little thinking he was so near,

and glancing at her through the partly-opened door.

What could she be looking at? Or had she been reading, and fallen asleep over her book? She could not be asleep, neither, for she kept her workbox open with one hand, and appeared to be gazing at something she held in the other, though what that something might be, was to him a mystery.

Opening the door still wider, he stepped inside, but finding she did not hear him, he thought to steal up to her, and peep over her shoulder before she knew of his being there; for she looked so earnestly, and sighed so deeply, he thought that she must be either reading a strangely interesting story, or looking at something she prized above all things.

Still she did not stir; but intent on reading, or in gazing, never lifted up her eyes, nor heard him as he stole so close up to her side he could have touched her with his outstretched arm.

A long-drawn respiration, then an aching sigh, excited his curiosity and filled his mind with a feverish desire to know what she was looking at, and why she gazed so attentively in her hand. She had not even noticed him come into the room, but absorbed in thought, still gazed and looked, as if her other senses had

been gathered to her eyes, and left her unconscious of everything besides.

A step. A single step, and he was standing over her like a phantom, as leaning over her he shadowed her fair head, and overwhelmed her with his shade. That single step, and the glance that followed, discovered all! changed the expression of his face into something terrible, as looking straight into her hand and bending forward, he saw, as he supposed, the proof of her falsehood, and knew at once that he had been deceived.

Lovingly embraced and clasped in his wife's hand he saw—not a jewel, not a book, as he had at first imagined—but a man's portrait! The likeness of a lover, and one so bright, so handsome, he longed to snatch the miniature away and dash it to atoms.

White as the shoulder over which he leaned, pale as the cheek his hot breath fanned, and trembling with consuming passion, he stood to mark him down, and treasure in his mind the image of that face as something to be remembered and hated till his dying day; then glaring at it, as if to blot it out and wither it eternally, drew slowly back, but with his eyes still fixed, as if he saw it still, and over the palm leaves worked upon the carpet, stole like a tiger through a jungle:

glided down the stairs as if afraid of his own foot-fall, but on reaching the landing, stayed for a moment to collect his thoughts ; then going out, reflected on what he had seen, and the shameful imposition of which he had been made the victim.

The more he thought, the more he felt incensed, and once or twice looked back towards the house as if some fatal purpose were working in his mind, which he had not courage to carry out ; for he wavered and turned pale—staggered and drooped, then shivering from head to foot, drew further off, and seemed as though he longed for the darkest cavern in the earth in which to hide himself, and brood over his wrongs.

Then all at once he changed ; longed for bustle—noise, for motion and excitement ; and unable to control his feelings, ran wildly in the direction of the avenue, dashed down it, and running at full speed, appeared unconscious why he ran, or what he did, until he reached the centre, when he tripped and fell ! Not as a man under ordinary circumstances would fall, but as if struck by lightning, and tumbled in a heap upon the ground.

CHAPTER XIV.

THIEVES! THIEVES!

UNCONSCIOUS of what had taken place, or of her husband having seen her with Frederick's portrait in her hand, gazing at it, and recalling to her mind each fond expression of his face—Margaret locked the miniature in her workbox, and then, to prevent her husband seeing she had been crying, she dried her eyes, and endeavoured to remove all traces of recent emotion by preparing for his return, and dressed herself with more than usual care, thinking to please him, and make him smile on seeing her.

He came home late—long after his usual time—and looking so wild and haggard, she felt quite shocked at his appearance, and anxiously inquired what had happened, or if he had met with an accident. Instead of answering, or bestowing the least attention on her, he turned from her with a sullen scowl, took no notice of her, and after a time went out again, saying, he should not return till late, and as he had several letters to write, and a good many things to do before he went to bed, she had better not sit up for him,

but go to bed 'as early as she liked, for he wished to be alone. As he was so abrupt, and so cross that he scarcely deigned to reply to her, she left him to get the better of his ill humour, and going to her room sat reading or working till it was time to go to bed, but when she went to bed, she could not sleep with thinking of his altered manner, and his sulky sullen look, as if she had done something to offend him, and could not be permitted to approach him till she had made amends.

He told her he had letters to write ; but if he had, why did he keep walking up and down his room, murmuring, and muttering, and talking to himself so loudly ? She heard him long after she had been in bed ; and even when she slept dreamt she heard him moving still, and creeping through the rooms like an unquiet spirit.

He was fast asleep in the morning, when a servant came to say that the house had been broken open during the night, and a variety of articles carried off ; that the drawing-room window was wide open, the whole place in confusion, and the floor strewn with valuables the thieves had not time to take away.

Leaping out of bed, and slipping on his dressing-gown, Ellerton went raging out of the room, and, on coming back, told her to get up at once, for the place was in such a state of

disorder he hardly knew what was stolen, though her jewel-case he knew was gone, but what else he could not tell without a further search.

Waked up so suddenly, and alarmed at the intelligence, Margaret dressed herself hurriedly, and, going into the drawing-room, found the cabinet in which her jewel-case had been kept forced open, the casket gone, and the carpet and the tables covered with litter, and a scene of confusion on all sides impossible to describe.

Fortunately for her, she had taken her work-box into the bedroom, or that would have gone also; but on going to look for it she found, to her dismay, that it was nowhere to be seen, though she was certain she had taken it with her and placed it on her dressing-table before going to bed.

Distracted at her loss, and knowing that Frederick's portrait was in that box, she ran back to the drawing-room, and, utterly indifferent to the loss of the jewels, began complaining bitterly of the cruelty of the robbers, and wondering why they should have carried off an ordinary looking box like that, and left behind so many things of infinitely greater value.

Her surprise may be imagined when, on looking on the floor, she saw her workbox broken in a thousand pieces, the woodwork

wrenched and splintered, the inside torn to fragments, and the contents scattered about in all directions ; but in hopes the thieves might have left the miniature behind, or had dropped it in their haste, she searched and searched, carefully inspected every bit of broken glass, or glittering particle, and never left off searching till convinced of her misery, she gave up all hopes of regaining it, and knew for certain that it was gone for ever.

She did not dare to express herself too strongly, or indulge in grief over what, to her, was a serious misfortune, for her husband began to express his wonder at her wasting her time looking after the trifles contained in her workbox, when the jewels were something worth fretting about, and could not be so easily replaced as a trumpery box, though she did make so great a fuss about it, and seemed to care more for that than for the present he had given her after their first acquaintance.

What was that jewel-case to her ! She would sooner have parted with a hundred like it, than have lost that small round piece of ivory, and the rim of gold encircling it. The one might be replaced, but her lover's portrait could not. It was the one thing in the world she prized, and, now that was gone, the last hope of Frederick

seemed gone with it, and her heart sank within her with thinking of her loss.

But her husband! why did he look with such a searching eye, watching her every action, and smiling with a sinister curl about the lips as if enjoying her agony? Or was he angry with her, and willing to express his discontent at seeing her indifference to the loss of his love gift by the unusual care she bestowed on what she had lost herself, little suspecting that it was the treasure of her life she had lost, and the sole remaining link to join the present to the past.

Yet not to throw a chance away, and in case the thieves might have dropped it in the garden, she searched in that as well, looked everywhere, and set the servants to search as well, though all the time pretending to be looking for the jewels, and disguising her anxiety by an affected diligence to discover what she cared the least about.

The strangest part of all, was that no one could discover the slightest trace of the burglars, nor the way they had entered the house. There were no marks on the walls, no footsteps on the flower-beds, and nothing to show their object in entering the house—unless to steal the jewel-case and that insignificant workbox—for they had left so many valuables behind, it appeared as though an entrance had been effected solely to obtain

those, and not, as burglars generally do, carry off all they can lay their hands upon.

Margaret never thought of this, but, occupied with her individual loss, reflected upon that, and left others to busy themselves as to how the burglary had been committed, and the particular mode of entry by which they had effected it.

Angus was not so easily satisfied. He had to search and find out all about it, and till he found it, not a wink of sleep could he get, nor an hour's comfort. He had heard nothing during the night. The dogs were loose, yet never barked, and unless that gipsy thief he had suspected from the first, had drugged them, he could not for the life of him make out how it had been done.

The windows had been found wide open; so the servant said who had roused his master, and stuck to it on being questioned. But then the window was an awkward thing to get at. There was a projecting coping underneath, and nothing but a pear tree nailed against the wall, up which the gipsy *might* have climbed, but if he had, he must have taken off his big boots, or he would have left some marks upon the boughs, and rubbed the bark in climbing. But no, not a bit of it. All was smooth as glass, the fruit still hanging, and not a single twig broken, which it must have been if he or any of his pals had

gone up and then got down, holding by that. The rods, too, that fastened the window, had to be lifted on the inside, not the out. And as these were found pulled up, and the glass had not been broken, why it seemed pretty clear that some one must have lent a hand inside as well as out—that is, if the thief had anyone outside to help at all, and had not done it of himself, and, like a stupid, forgot he might be found out by trying to make it appear that the rods could be got at through the window without first breaking it.

The thief, if there were a thief, had had a game of his own to play; and Angus thought he should not have much trouble in finding him, if he only made up his mind to try, and set about it cautiously. He was *in* the house, not out. But out or in, it was his duty to discover him, then let him do as he liked, and explain it as he could.

His mistress had been hard put to it, that was certain; and terribly distressed at losing something she valued. His master took it more easily; he looked rather pleased than angry, and though he had made a great noise at first, he soon got over it, and pocketed his loss in a way a man seldom does who has been robbed, and robbed of a case of jewels, as he said he had been.

“It’s all mighty fine,” said Angus, “but it’s my belief that, as the jewels and the something my mistress lost did not go without hands, we must look for the thief inside the house, so there’s an end of that.”

But what was he to do? His master evidently did not want the thief to be found; but suppose he did, wouldn’t it be as well to sound him first, and make sure he should not be getting into hot water by over-officiousness, and meddling with what did not concern him?

He thought he’d try it—cautiously at first, of course; and on asking his master if he did not think it strange that the rods should lift up of themselves on purpose to let somebody in, who never appeared to have got in at all, but most likely was safe enough inside, and not in a hurry to leave the least signs of having been out, though the beds under the window were so soft, and the pear-tree liable to be snapped if a child had hung on it, instead of a hulking fellow of a thief.

It was enough for Angus, and for Ellerton too, to judge by his look and the altered expression of his face. If an officer had clapped his hand upon a thief’s shoulder and taxed him with a robbery, he could not have changed colour more rapidly, nor have looked more guilty; though he

suddenly recovered himself, and told Augus to hold his tongue, and not go talking of what he did not understand, unless he wished the servants to turn round on him for daring to suspect some one in the house, when it was clear as daylight that an entrance had been effected by burglars, and the jewels carried off by people well acquainted with their value.

Angus looked, but said nothing; and as his master, before leaving, said he did not wish any fuss made about it, but would rather bear the loss than be put to any further trouble, he was wise enough to take the hint, and, with a view to hush the matter up, advised the servants to keep their own counsel, and not go talking in the neighbourhood of what had happened, for fear it should get wind, and a whole gang of thieves come some night or other to strip the place, and put them all in danger of their lives.

This had the desired effect. The robbery ceased to be talked about, and as no allusion was ever made by Ellerton or his wife to either the jewels or the workbox, the burglary passed like a nine days' wonder, and soon became forgotten. The servants left off double-locking their doors, the dogs were tied up, Angus slept without being disturbed, and as for a thief, however actively he might be employed in other districts, in that

neighbourhood it was clear he had left off practice.

But though forgotten, or apparently forgotten, the events of the night had left a deep impression on Margaret, and filled her husband's mind with deeper gloom and more unmitigated distrust than ever. He never smiled, seldom cast off his look of earnest watchfulness, but, as if he had greater occasion than ever to maintain a careful espionage over his wife's actions, he determined not to give her the opportunity to take advantage of his absence, but on pretence of arranging his library or of writing, remained so constantly at home, he defied her to perfect any sinister design against him, or to carry on a clandestine intercourse, without his being aware of it.

The servants wondered at the unaccountable change. The women pitying their mistress, and hoping they should never marry such a man; and Angus, like a faithful watch-dog, studying his master's looks, and hanging about as if not quite knowing what to do, or what his master was thinking of, who was restless and uneasy, was always on the watch, and looking out for something that never seemed to come.

Yet wait and watch his master did, and, by a strange perversity of disposition, fancied he detected a variety of schemes to deceive him, and

a studied attempt to put him off his guard on every possible occasion. That he *had* been deceived, he knew, and aware that an opportunity was only wanting for still further deception, he thought he saw it in every look and action, and therefore resolved to be prepared to meet it whenever it might come.

He could not tax his wife with her falsehood, deeply as he felt it, and complained in secret of her conduct to him, without first acquainting her with the grounds of his suspicion, and the reason of his supposing she was deceiving him, and had deceived him from the hour they first met. He could not even hint at what he knew, nor of having seen her with the miniature in her hand, gazing at it, and breathing love and kisses on that hated face. He had been a witness of her agony at losing it, her anguish and utter disregard to everything but that, and though she had tried to deceive him even then, he knew too well what she was looking for, and how willingly she would have exchanged his love-gifts for that painted bit of ivory, that small red case, and that thin rim of gold edging her lover's portrait.

How was he to find him out? Through what device, and by what means? He did not dare to question the servants, or bribe them to betray

their mistress. His pride revolted at that, and yet how to drive her into the net? There was Angus; but Angus was not an agent to be trusted in so delicate a matter. He would do well enough on ordinary occasions, but in this, he required the cunning and the slyness of the fox—not the wildness of the wolf. There was but one way of finding out what he wished, and that was to lie in wait and watch for her himself; to pretend to give her the opportunity, and then, when she thought herself secure, to break upon them when they least expected him, and confound them with their guilt.

He had seen enough to satisfy him they were in league against him, but, as he felt, he required further evidence—a letter, an intercepted message, and some positive assurance she was intriguing with a lover before he could accuse her openly—he took the only course left in his power, and, informing her that he had been ordered to take horse exercise, or had to go to London, remained away for days and nights together, or, if for the day only, returning at any unexpected moment, and then, pretending to be fatigued, he would go to bed, and, feigning sleep, would remain upon the watch till his doubts were ended for that night at least.

She had plenty of opportunities, abundant

chances, yet, strange to say, he could detect nothing! saw no one hanging about, nor the least signs of any communication going forward between the house and the town; no letters received or sent, and though so constantly on the watch, he was bound to confess that he had discovered nothing to compromise his wife, or to confirm the suspicions he entertained of her.

These rides into the country or journeys up to town occurred so frequently as to attract little attention at last, and whether he came or went, stayed at home or remained abroad, it made no difference. His wife had grown so used to it, and the servants so accustomed to see him come home now at one time, now at another, but always at night, and frequently after they were in bed, that they came to the conclusion that their master must be out of his mind, and his wife about as miserable a woman as they ever saw.

There was but one person who had his doubts upon the subject, and that was Angus.

He knew better than anyone that those rides, and journeys up to town, were all a sham, and that they never took place at all, though he kept his own counsel, and pretended to be as much imposed upon as the rest. But he was not. He knew his master never went away at all; never stirred a step from home, but, while supposed to

be in London, or a good twenty miles away riding for his health, that he was lying concealed within a short distance from the house, and keeping watch upon it to make sure who came out or who went in.

No one could escape his observation where he lay, either in a copse near to the avenue, or, more frequently than either, in a small keeper's cottage left vacant by the death of its occupant, and kept unoccupied to suit his master's whim. Here he would sit for days and nights together, or, creeping out, watch under cover of the trees the approaches to the house, if any signal were made from his wife's window, and if, indeed, the least suspicious circumstance were to be detected in any one direction, sufficient to rouse him into action and confirm his already fixed suspicions.

Angus had watched him do all this, and he thought himself so vastly cunning, and able to do what Angus could not, that the man had much advantage over the master, so that while one watched, the other watched as well, but never gave the least sign that he was observing him during the whole course of his master's mysterious prying about the house.

As to riding, of course he knew all about that, and that as soon as he got a little way off he came back by an unfrequented path, and put

up his horse in the keeper's lodge. Here he was free to do as he pleased, and could stay there, or hide himself behind that clump of trees he generally resorted to as commanding a better view of the house, and as no one ever went in that direction he could have watched till doomsday—only Angus was too sharp for him, and keep him constantly in sight for all his cleverness.

If he wasn't mad, it was something very like it, and as a faithful servant he determined to get at the secret of his master's lying in wait, and obtain a more accurate knowledge of what he was about than he at present possessed.

He was rather inclined to suspect that there was something the matter between him and his wife, and that they did not agree so well as they might. He had noticed a change ever since the night of the robbery, and began to suspect that though he could not make it out, they understood it themselves, and that there was a secret connecting the something she had lost with the burglary, and that that something lay at the bottom of all the fuss and annoyance, not to say ill-will, that had happened ever since. But as he did not like the notion of letting his master know he was acquainted with his movements, or that he watched him quite as closely—or more so—as

his master watched anyone approach or quit the house—he could not quite determine which way to set about it for fear of incensing him, and being made to pay the penalty of his over officiousness.

Cogitating what to do and how to set about it, he at length hit upon a plan, and one day coming suddenly upon his master as if by accident, pretended to be surprised at seeing him, and saying he did not know he had come back, asked if he should take his horse and groom it.

He never tried it again. His master flew at him, and telling him if he ever caught him dogging his steps again, and trying to get the better of him, it should be the worse for him; left him to think over what he had said, and mentally to resolve on letting him do what he liked, and go where he liked, before he would meddle with him or did anything to put him in such a towering passion again.

But then how was he to persuade him out of his mad humour, or help him in what he wished, unless he *did* discover his intention? He would have given a good deal, and risked a good deal, to have seen his master restored to himself, and have him like himself, and not transformed to the singular person he now appeared to be: crazy,

and not to be depended on from one hour to another.

He knew it was of no use persuading him : that would only make matters worse, and draw the whole weight of his anger on himself, instead of on the person he was watching for. But as he felt certain it was his wife's fault, and owing to something she had done, that his master kept wandering about, and pretended to be absent all the time he was close at home, he thought she had better mind what she did, or sure as she was alive, she would repent it, and might come to know it too, if his master only said the word, and gave him a hint of what he wished to be done by way of making her behave herself.

It was of no use talking. Angus had made up his mind to be satisfied, and satisfied he would be if he got every bone in his body broken. He might not be able to help him much, but he could do one thing—he could at least get at the reason of his master's strangeness, and come to a right understanding regarding his behaviour.

The places he mostly frequented were the keeper's lodge, a clump of trees, and a thick mass of bushes lying a short distance from the house, and so situated that he could look out and keep an eye upon the approaches to the house, either by

way of the carriage-drive, or by the less frequented pathway through the avenue. Here, as a rule, Angus knew he could be found at most times, but not in the middle of the day, for the servants were about then, and people passing to and fro, so that there was less chance of a stranger coming whose appearance might excite attention, and perhaps occasion observations to be made respecting him. There was another place he went to then—a spot so seldom visited, he might have lain there half his life and no one have suspected his being there—had not Angus found it out, and tracked him to it.

It lay in a wood, a little removed out of the common pathway, and in a natural hollow of the ground, edged round with overhanging trees and a wild growth of furze and brambles. Here he would take his rest, and like some tiger in his lair, wait for the midday hours to pass, and then steal out in hopes to pounce upon his prey.

The hollow was deep, but dry: spread with long grass, and the steep sides encumbered here and there by struggling shoots and pendant boughs. It was so dark and still—so far removed from traffic, and so wholly shut out from the world, a man might lie there and moan his life away and no one be a bit the wiser, unless he were discovered by the merest accident.

This was the spot he chose, and here Angus thought it not unlikely that he might get at what he wanted, and find out the secret of his disorder, if he could only come upon him unawares, or hide himself somewhere about whence he could keep an eye upon him and ascertain the reason of this mysterious watching; this unaccountable lying in wait, and his pretended journeys up to town and elsewhere.

It was not so easy as it seemed, to hide himself, or find a place to look from without being observed. But on going once or twice and studying beforehand, he fancied he had hit on one, and resolved to try it the very next time he saw his master going with the intention of keeping himself concealed, and at that particular time Angus had frequently observed him steal towards the place.

He had not long to wait. Lounging at the stile the following day, yet keeping a sharp look out, he saw his master come along; his hands behind his back, his head hung down, and walking towards the spot selected for his mid-day musings.

There was no time to be lost, and taking to his heels Angus ran for it: ran under hedges, or broke through them, and taking good care not to let his master catch a glimpse of him, he dodged

in and out, got well into the wood, and once in it, bounded from tree to tree, until he found himself on the edge of the hollow where he knew his master would presently come, and remain for several hours.

It was well he had looked where to hide, or he might have been hard put to it to find a shelter. But the bough he had selected was in its old place, and sweeping over the hollow, lay right across, firm as a rock, and branching in so many shoots, the leaves and smaller limbs would hide a dozen men, if they were fairly laid along it, and held fast.

The stem rose like a mighty column from the ground from which that bough depended, and springing up it like a cat, Angus clung to it with his knees and hands, laid hold of knots and knobs, and clambering up, got to a level with the branch, then crawling on it, and drawing himself along, he got to the centre, but found to his annoyance, that mighty as the limb appeared to be, and strong enough to bear twenty times his weight, that it swayed beneath him, and that the rustling of its leaves might betray him.

He was on it, that was one good thing, but only just in time, for as the motion ceased, and the huge bough became once more stationary, he

heard his master crash down into the hollow : break through the matted growth of twig and sapling, and the next minute saw him throw himself upon the ground, cover his face with his hands, and commence groaning as if his heart would break.

He could see and hear all this distinctly, but not what he took from his pocket and began to look at with such intense ferocity. Lying at full length upon the bough, and keeping in one position, he could look and see his master lean upon his elbow and glare at something he held in his hand, but nothing further, for he held his head so close over it, and kept it grasped so firmly, that there appeared little chance of getting a peep, unless he contrived to get a better view, or could let the sun fall on it through the parted leaves.

It was a dangerous experiment, but he tried it, and found it succeed. By pressing back the smaller twigs, so as to form an opening, and holding others in his hand, he made a space through which the sunlight shot down, and glancing right below, revealed his master's secret, though it had well nigh discovered him.

Starting as if a snake had stung him when he saw the light glimpse upon that face and brighten it as if by magic, his master threw his

hand aside, and looking up, saw nothing but that long thin streak shoot down, then altering his position, and bending his gaze upon his hand again, never stirred till it was time to go.

But Angus had seen enough. He had seen by that brief ray a miniature clasped in his master's hand, and on it, the likeness of a man. He could see that well enough by the cut of the head, and the dress, but not beyond; nor if he were young and handsome, old or ugly. His master had seen enough as well, by the way he glared and scowled upon that face, then closing the case and putting it back into his pocket, he appeared to lose command over himself, and moaning bitterly, uttered a few harsh words, then went away to wait and watch again soon as the daylight waned, and he had a better chance of detecting what he sought.

It was all plain now, and Angus had wit enough to understand the reason of his master's conduct, and his ceaseless watching. The robbery—everything—was accounted for. His master had found what his mistress had lost, and no doubt, had made it appear that a burglary had been committed on purpose to get it into his possession.

CHAPTER XV.

COLONEL DICK.

BERTHA's visit to her sister had been delayed by a variety of circumstances. Firstly, her mother had been indisposed, and secondly, young Leonard Blissett expressed so many serious apprehensions in case of any accident befalling her on the way, that she was really afraid to go. There was a third reason, but that was easier to get over than either of the others. It was, that she disliked her sister's husband; had disliked him from the first, and now he was her brother-in-law for good or bad, felt she had a right to deal with him as she thought proper, and, in a strictly family sense, make known her objection to him to her mother, who of course defended him, and took his part upon all occasions.

The more she talked and praised, the more Bertha censured and found fault, and as Miss Bertha had an aptness for saying spiteful things, and of maintaining an argument tolerably well, Mrs. Rushbrook gave up the task as hopeless, and left her daughter and her son-in-law to get on as they could—that is, provided they had an

opportunity to become better friends than they were at present.

Mrs. Rushbrook had enough to do to appear contented when, indeed, she was ill at ease, and charmed with her son-in-law, at the very time she began to entertain serious doubts that she had made a mistake in forcing her daughter to accept him against her inclinations. She had tried to believe him everything she desired, but recent events had rather startled her, and made her anxious for her child's happiness, about which she had reason to doubt.

She seldom wrote: and when she did write, hardly mentioned her husband, or spoke of him, except as being engaged in making improvements on the estate, or planning alterations in the house; she never alluded to him in affectionate terms, nor spoke of him as a wife should speak of her husband. And then again, though she said she was well, she never mentioned the word happiness, but left her to draw her own conclusions, and distress herself with thinking that she was *not* happy, or not so happy as she wished.

But there was one circumstance she always dwelt upon—always spoke of, and by constantly repeating it—led her as a mother, to suppose that it was not only a great discomfort but a serious annoyance to her.

It was Angus. Indeed, to judge by the way she wrote of him he seemed to be the principal person thought about, and the one most objected to. She was evidently afraid of him; and enlarging on his devotion to her husband, spoke of his slavish obedience to him with ill-concealed alarm. At times indeed she went so far as to say, that she did not think her life would be safe if her husband wished to get rid of her, and Angus Macleod happened to hear him say so. This was, of course, a foolish notion; but not the less a trouble, when she remembered that Angus was the only person trusted, and her daughter of secondary consideration in the house where she ought to be the first.

And was that "dog"—that Angus, whom she had told the servant to ask into the kitchen to have a warm, and some supper—was he to be set over her daughter, and make her tremble for her very life? Was that castaway to act in opposition to her wish, follow her, go sneaking after, and hang upon their heels when he was not wanted, and be encouraged to insult her, instead of being horsewhipped for his insolence?

This was beyond endurance, and if Margaret submitted to it, she deserved to suffer anything. Only fancy Bertha being watched and followed when she did not like. There would have been

a pretty scene, and Mrs. Rushbrook could not with a safe conscience say, she thought she would have been far wrong if she had left her husband in consequence, and not gone back till Angus had been dismissed, and sent about his business for the good-for-nothing prying fellow she described him to be.

It was sad enough to have to think of this, and find her scheme to promote her daughter's happiness fall short of completion. It was very sad! But then, thank Heaven, she had done her best, and if the marriage turned out badly, what woman in the universe could have foreseen it, or imagined that so rich a husband could be so great a savage.

There was her other daughter still unmarried. She would arrange differently for her—or rather she would let her arrange for herself, and take the responsibility off her hands. She was engaged to Mr. Leonard Blissett, and as the family was so perfectly respectable, there could be little doubt that it would turn out a highly satisfactory match, and prove a comfort to all parties.

Mr. Blissett was an uncommonly kind man, and though Mrs. Blissett was a little too fond of pleasure, and of making herself appear ridiculously young—there were many worse people in the world, and not half so well off. So Mrs.

Rushbrook tried to be contented, though she took every opportunity to warn her daughter against love of pleasure, and of falling into what she called, "Mrs. Blissett's preposterous, if not wicked ideas upon the subject."

Bertha was to have passed the evening with them the night before, but it being wet did not go, so they were not in the least surprised at seeing Mr. Blissett, who came next day to say that, wet or shine, she must go that night, or if she did not, they should come in a body and fetch her, and carry her off between them. To which proposition Mrs. Rushbrook slightly demurred, though she thanked him for his kindness, and professed herself infinitely obliged by his good nature and attention.

"Not at all, my dear madam, not at all," said Mr. Blissett. "We are the persons obliged, and as there is a prospect of our families being united, let us anticipate the future, and consider ourselves one already."

"I am sure I shall be only too happy to do anything you wish, and shall look forward to my daughter's marriage with your son with extreme delight. The best kind of affection, my dear sir, is that which is unselfish, and as my Bertha has been always cautioned against selfish or mercenary motives, you may quite depend upon it,

that she entertains a true affection for your son, and would marry him without a penny to-morrow morning, if we would permit it."

"Ah! that's the point!"

"It is our duty, my dear sir, to be prudent, and nothing short of duty will I ever be guided by. And as there is every chance of happiness before them, my earnest hope is, that they may never know the want of it, but live to enjoy it long after I shall be called away, and leave a wicked world in hopes of a better."

"Now, my dear madam, do for once leave the world alone, and let us make ourselves contented as we are, and not grumble because we are not something different. You and I have seen enough of life to know that there are good and bad of all sorts. But what of that? We cannot all be angels, and if a rogue crops up now and then, let us turn to the thousand other instances in which men are to be found, ready to serve and assist, and do a good turn to others. Death is an ugly customer come when he will, so the less you talk about it the better; and just now, to say truth, I would rather not be reminded of him, for I have recently seen a proof of his doings which has rather upset me."

"You alarm me! Nothing I hope——"

"Oh, no. We are all quite well at home,

thank God, and likely, I trust, to continue so for some time to come; though I have known him so long, it seems more like losing some one belonging to me than anything else."

"And who might he have been?" inquired Mrs. Rushbrook, sitting down to sew.

"It is a strange story, my dear madam, though by no means an uncommon one; I mean, it is nothing unusual for a man to die who has lived to a tolerably good age, but it is strange that he should die so obstinately, and as if he had a mind to spite himself, on purpose to benefit one I am positive he did not care a rush about, beyond the fact of his being his nephew, and fortunately close at hand, to benefit by his last will and testament."

"As far as it has gone the story is common enough," said the widow, "and not half so interesting as I expected."

"That's because we have not got to the marrow of it. This is merely a rough draft. Stop till it is properly engrossed, signed, sealed, and delivered, and you'll say it's not so bad a story, after all."

"I am sure I am quite willing to be convinced," replied the widow, but looking as if it would take a great deal to convince her.

"You must know then," said Mr. Blissett,

after a violent rub up of his hair, as if to excite its roots, and impart a corresponding activity to his brain; "you must know that that was not quite the way it happened, nor exactly how he left his fortune. But I forgot! I haven't killed him yet; and here am I talking of what he died worth, instead of telling you first of all how many years I had known the obstinate old fellow, and how the last hours of his life were the most obstinate of all."

"I hope he had a proper sense of his situation, and endeavoured to atone for his offences by repentance."

"Well, I don't know. He did not much care for awful situations at the best of times, and had seen so many I don't think he entertained that proper sense of his offences he ought to have had, or appeared aware of their magnitude."

"I am afraid he was a wicked, unrepenting wretch!" cried the widow, trying to pick out a knot in her thread.

"Like most old Indian officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Chesshyre had seen a deal of service, had drunk a deal of brandy, and did not care a button what people thought of him, so long as he discharged his duty and was first and foremost wherever fighting was to be had. There Colonel Dick, as he was called, was in his ele-

ment, and, as he was 'every inch a soldier,' and beloved by his men, he would have led them, if they'd only followed him, to the very——"

The old gentleman was rather put to it how to go on after this sudden break in his sentence ; but as Mrs. Rushbrook said nothing, though she looked a good deal shocked at what she knew he would have said if he had only dared, Mr. Blissett proceeded with his story, and made up his mind to keep out of bad company for the future.

"At Seringapatam he was in the thick of it—at Assaye he had his share, yet never boasted of what he had done, but took it as a matter of course. But then Master Dick was an oddity ; and although he pretended to be liberal, he was selfish to the backbone, and as great a skinflint as ever lived. Touch his pocket, and you touched his life. Yet no man ever spent more on himself, or tried to kill himself with eating and drinking more constantly than he did, and at last succeeded."

"What a horrid old man !"

"I have known more abstemious ones. But then Colonel Dick would have his way, and had it, for on leaving service, what did he do but bury himself in lodgings in Leadenhall Street, partly as I think to be near the "Ship and Turtle," and able to waddle to the India House

on board days without much fatigue, and join his brother directors in making a mess of the affairs of the Company."

"Oh! he was an India House Director, was he?"

"That makes a difference, doesn't it?" said Mr. Blissett, looking the widow in the face rather oddly. "But an India House Director he was, and though as rich as Cræsus, hardly remembered he had a relative, or took the least interest in any one belonging to him, but drank his port and Madeira, washed them down with brandy, fed on the richest and the best, and passed his life in unpardonable stuffing—if you will excuse the word."

"I will excuse anything if you will only make an end of the wicked monster, and come to how he died. I am afraid to hear in a most improper state of mind."

"Your wish is gratified. Behold the Colonel seized with an apoplectic stroke, and his life not worth an hour's purchase."

"Dreadful!"

"But it was. It was worth a good many hours' purchase; and had it not been for his pooh-poohing his doctor, and slighting his advice, he might have lived some time to come. But what were doctors—what the whole of Leaden-

hall Street, when Colonel Dick had made up his mind to do as he thought proper, and set reason at defiance? Instead of leaving off wine and brandy, or partially leaving them off, he went in for double doses, double rations, and—had a second stroke.”

“It was only what he might have expected, had he been a reasonable creature.”

“But he wasn’t. He never was a reasonable creature, and what is more was never intended to be one. He was simply born to wield a sword or scramble through a breach, and there you had the Colonel at his best. This second stroke rather sobered him, and time it did; when I was sent for to make his will. But not knowing exactly to whom he should leave his property, he had the parties’ names (to whom it might ultimately go) left in blank, so that they could be filled up in a hurry, and after he had made up his mind what to do with it—that is, unless a third stroke carried him off beforehand, and relieved the old Colonel of any further thinking on the subject.”

“And did it?”

“I am happy to say no. Emphatically no. Had it, his nephew would not now be the sole possessor of his wealth, and as likely to use it properly as any young man I ever had the hap-

piness to meet in the course of my professional experience."

"And who is he?"

"A very different person I assure you from his uncle; though to judge from his appearance, a little turtle, port, and old Madeira would be of service to him, for I don't think I ever saw a young fellow so pulled down by sickness in all my life."

"Poor young man! I feel for him, as I should feel for any one who had been ill, and had no mother perhaps to look after him."

"I thought you would. But as to a mother, he has a very dear mother, and a very attentive mother, so on the score of nursing we will consider he has been very well cared for. And so was Dick. But the Colonel was too far gone for that, and though in a sudden fit of despondency he had written to his sister to say he was poorly (he could not, would not, say he was dying), he as suddenly repented when he found himself alive next morning; and raved and stormed when his nephew came to see him a few days afterwards—asked if he had not had enough out of him, and if the ensigncy (which cost him nothing) he had given him was not sufficient for such a pale-faced fellow, but he must come up all the way from Yorkshire to try and pick him bare as a bone."

“Yorkshire!”

“So he said, and nothing short of his going back appeared likely to satisfy him, when the young man said, ‘that he thanked him very much for what he had done for him, but did not wish to trouble him any further, for he had quite made up his mind to go abroad at once, in hopes he might be fortunate enough to be engaged in some desperate battle, and be killed in the discharge of his duty.’”

“How very disinterested. But was it true? Young men, I am sorry to say, are not always to be trusted where money is concerned, and what is worse, are not so disinterested as we could wish.”

“It was strictly, undeniably true, and though his wishing to die may sound rather odd, he *did* wish it, and at that moment would have been glad to have rushed out then and there—had a battle been raging in the heart of the City—and put an end to his miserable existence without loss of time.”

“But why in a battle? If he had wished to die he might surely have preferred——”

“A bed, perhaps. But a battle it was; and as the old Colonel was always thinking of fighting and talking of fighting, the mention of a battle at that particular time roused him up, and

set him longing for the smell of gunpowder, like an old goose as he was, and when he could not have stirred an inch to save his life."

"Well, of all the savage old monsters I ever heard of——"

"But the Colonel was not a monster; and taking a sudden liking for his nephew he commanded him to stay where he was, and sent for me, when finding, as he said, that he did not get any stronger—poor fellow! he was so weak he could hardly speak—he told me to fill in the blanks with his nephew's name—fill in all of them—and leaving him his sole heir, bequeathed him every shilling he possessed."

"It is to be hoped the young man proved his gratitude by doing all in his power to prepare his wicked old uncle to pass the remainder of his good-for-nothing life as a Christian should do."

"There was not much time for that. Before the ink was fairly dried, a third stroke blackened his already purple face, swelled out his neck, and there lay poor old Dick, fattened till he could hardly hobble, saturated with drink like a wine-cask, oiled by turtle and greased by venison, yet shrivelled up internally! burnt and scorched by curry and pilau, hot-pot and Cayenne, until his system could hold no more, when Nature

mercifully made an end of him, and left him to go out like a puff of powder, in a fume!"

"But his nephew? You said he came from Yorkshire, and that his mother——"

"Oh! his name is Frederick."

"And his mother's?"

"Arkwright."

There was no more sewing that day. Mr. Blissett took his leave, Mrs. Rushbrook sat gazing on the ground, and, drawing in it that black and purple face, thought she saw it glaring and gasping at her, as if to make game of her, and tell her what a fool she had been not to look after what the owner of that face had had it in his power to leave before acting as she had done.

Even when Bertha came into the room and touched her on the shoulder she looked confused, and complaining of headache, went early to bed, where she reflected on what she had heard, and then began to blame herself for not having listened to Margaret, or at least for not making inquiries into young Arkwright's prospects. Had she done so, had she but taken ordinary pains to ascertain his real position, she might have thought differently, and secured her daughter's happiness by marrying her to the man she loved, instead of to one she disliked.

All this might have been brought about had she been a little less prejudiced, or had she happened to hear of his having an uncle rolling in riches—an uncle who was an India House Director and a Nabob; but so notoriously addicted to habits of intemperance, he might be struck down at an hour's notice, and leave his nephew heir to all his property.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RECOGNITION.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CHESSHYRE was buried. A suburban churchyard had been chosen for his resting-place, and though in life he preferred the noisiest of thoroughfares, and the dullest of all dull lodgings, in the darkest of all dark houses, he had, oddly enough, chosen (and about the time he had chosen his heir) an out-of-town lodging for his body; carefully defined a particular tree under which he wished his mortal remains to lie, and appeared to be very nice about the exact depth of his grave.

Whether that tree had been associated in his mind with bygone recollections of some one he had loved, or it had been a favourite spot in early life, he was strangely anxious to prevent a mistake being made, and insisted that in that churchyard, and near that tree he should be buried, and remain shut out from a world in which he had played so busy and selfish a part.

It was not to be expected that Frederick should be seriously affected at the death of an

uncle he had only recently seen, or be so overwhelmed by grief as to be insensible of the advantages conferred upon him by his unexpected fortune. He knew the extent of his obligation to his departed uncle, and out of respect to his memory testified a decent sorrow, and without affecting too deep a regret, left an impression that he really grieved for him, and lamented a benefactor as became him.

His father and brother had of course been present at the funeral, and Mr. Blissett, as his uncle's eldest friend, was also present. There was no show, no attempt at display; but a quiet decent cortége followed the Colonel to his last home, and when the time arrived for the body to be interred, his mourners gathered round the grave and paid their last tribute of respect to the old soldier with becoming decency.

His brother was of course a pattern of propriety, and did exactly what he ought to do, but nothing further. He was cold as stone; followed as a matter of duty, and though he attended to the ceremony with a truly religious spirit, never exhibited a spark of feeling or shed a tear over his uncle's remains. He was so cold, so utterly indifferent, his father had to remind him more than once of his near relationship to the departed, and that as a nephew he ought to

pay more respect to his uncle's memory than he did.

But Ernest had his answer ready, and replied, "he felt as deeply as he could the loss of so near a relative, but as that relative had never thought about *him*, but had left everything he possessed to his brother—his India Bonds, his Consols, land, and jewels—he did not see why he should particularly care about him, or cry his eyes out over a sinful old reprobate who had not even had the decency to send for him in his last extremity to make him sensible of the wicked life he had led ; but left him, for aught he cared, to die in a ditch, or in some poor living quite beneath his merits."

As Mr. Ernest had some reason to complain of the preference shown his brother, and took no pains to conceal it, it may be as well to watch how Frederick behaved under the circumstances, and if he still retained, in spite of his altered fortune, the same kind, amiable disposition as of old, or if, elated by success, he changed so entirely from what he had been, that his brother had to caution him not to be worldly and mercenary, but to imitate his example and become as extraordinary a pattern of generosity as himself.

Frederick of course had many matters to

attend to, and as Mr. Blissett had been appointed sole executor under the will, he had enough to do in keeping appointments and regulating (under Mr. Blissett's advice) his affairs. But as after a time he could be better spared, and Mr. Blissett had full authority to act for him, he expressed his wish to go into the country for a change of air, and see what that would do towards re-establishing his health.

Mr. Blissett could not of course object, and though he had his suspicions as to where he wished to go, and could not help fancying that he had set his heart on seeing Margaret once again, and bidding her a last adieu; he did not positively acquaint him of his suspicions, or inform him that he was aware of the engagement formerly existing between that lady and himself, though he threw out a few hints by way of caution and to advise him not to do anything either to compromise the lady or bring himself in antagonism with her husband.

Frederick promised compliance, and assured Mr. Blissett he had no intention of visiting their neighbourhood, or of doing anything prejudicial to their peace. It would have been as well if he had adhered to this determination or altered his original design, the object of which was to discover where she lived and hang about the house

and grounds until he found an opportunity to speak to her.

His first thought in coming up to town was Margaret. She was his first thought still, and as he was now possessed of means to have overcome her mother's scruples and make him a match worth having had she but waited, he felt the misery of his situation doubled when he reflected on the short time it would have taken to alter his position and make him happy with the woman he loved.

She was not in London now, though he knew she had been by seeing her at the theatre, but only for a moment, for she left her box almost immediately, and he saw her no more. But as he had many opportunities for hearing of her through Leonard Blissett, whom he had met at his father's office, and from Bertha, through meeting her in that gentleman's company, he ascertained that she had gone with her husband to their country seat, and was not likely to return to London for some time to come.

He had promised Mr. Blissett to do nothing to excite her husband's jealousy, or distress her by forcing himself upon her against her will. He wished to keep his word, but could not resist the temptation of going where he might behold her in secret, without its being suspected that he had come

expressly for that purpose, and was prepared to encounter a world of difficulty before he could succeed.

Without once thinking of the mischief he might occasion, or the consequences his visit might entail should he be observed watching her too closely, he engaged a place in the coach, and starting that very evening for the country town near which she lived, thought that by keeping himself secluded he should be able not only to avoid exciting her husband's jealousy, but keep him in ignorance of his whereabouts ; since having heard of his suspicious character, he felt it better to avoid contention with him for the sake of his wife, and preserve as strict an incognito as possible.

For him personally he did not care two straws, and as for his enmity, he defied him ; and would have preferred daring him to the worst to hiding from him. He had nothing to live for now, and having lost Margaret, it little mattered in what place he encountered death ; and as his ensigney had ceased to be of value, he would quite as soon have run his risk hand to hand with Ellerton, as in the midst of battles, fighting for a cause, perhaps, with which he had no sympathy.

That he should hate Ellerton, and look upon

Margaret as sacrificed, were only natural. He was a man, according to all report, so peculiarly unsuited to her in consequence of the uncertainty of his temper, it did not appear possible that she could be happy, or consent to live with him for any length of time; and as he knew Margaret had too much pride to suffer herself to be doubted, or submit to suspicion, there seemed little chance of her having even a share of that happiness she would have enjoyed with him, had she but married him as was originally intended.

There was no remedy for it as it was, nor any probability of matters taking a sudden turn to his advantage, either by her husband's death, or her divorce from him. Still he could not help fancying that through some unknown agency he might be of service to her or interfere in her protection; and though he had no reason to indulge in any such wild notion, or to hope that he could rescue her from her husband's tyranny, he was of so sanguine a temperament, that nothing appeared impossible where love was concerned, or where by his self-sacrifice he could contribute to her peace.

Bertha had told him that his attachment to her sister had been kept a profound secret from her husband, and that he had no idea of any previous engagement having existed between them.

Should this engagement by any unforeseen accident be discovered, or he be pointed out as his wife's former lover, lying in wait, and making inquiries after her—might he not imagine there was some understanding between the two, and that his wife had lent herself to the deception by prevailing upon him to follow her into the country, and be near at hand to answer to her call?

To prevent the possibility of any accident arising such as he supposed, Frederick determined to avoid the house, and, by remaining at some inn, to content himself with knowing that he breathed the same air with her, and was near to her, and could hear her talked about, or perhaps be so fortunate as to see her when he least expected it, or meet her in the neighbourhood.

He had but one hope, one solitary comfort to look forward to now he had lost her, and it is not too much to grudge him the small happiness he was content to find in watching and waiting for her; and utterly abjuring the pleasures of the world for her dear sake.

He had taken up his quarters at an inn in the High Street of the town near which she lived, and without taking into consideration that it was the very worst place he could have chosen, he flattered himself he should be able to make it appear

that he had come there for the sake of peace and quiet. And as that town was about the dullest town in England, there appeared every likelihood of his desires being gratified, if quiet were his object and not something else he had the prudence to keep to himself, and not let it get known for fear of accidents.

But as it was necessary to make a few inquiries, and find out where she lived, he did it very cleverly as he thought, and by asking the landlord respecting the different country seats, and the names of the gentry residing in the neighbourhood, soon knew all he wanted; but pretended to be engaged in writing all day long to put the landlord off his guard, and form a good excuse for going out at night.

Shut up in all but positive seclusion, he had no reason to complain of want of employment. His thoughts supplied it, and though he kept indoors by day, he went abroad at night, and when other people were in bed, he amused himself by watching Margaret's dwelling in the distance, or, climbing the park paling, hid in the avenue, and at times approached so near that he could look up at the windows and fancy he saw her shadow as she passed, or, drawing closer still, walk round and round the house, and down those same broad walks where she had walked, keep slowly on,

hoping to ease his aching heart by thinking upon her.

But then to know she was so near him, and that another had a right to call her his, while he was forced to skulk and peep about for fear of being seen, proved more than he could bear ; and nothing short of some desperate attempt to regain her appeared likely to satisfy him, or appease the love and hate with which he burned.

Thus, constantly watching, and as constantly dispirited ; prowling about the house without the slightest chance of seeing her, he would return to the inn to sleep off his disappointment, or lie awake and think of her—think of her as another's, and exposed to all the horrors of a hated match, and one so abhorrent to her, he wondered that in his heart she could ever consent to live with him, and not fly off to seek a home with him.

He had taken up his quarters at what was said to be the principal inn in the town ; first, because the coach changed horses there ; and next, because the coachman said it was. Its name was the “ Red Lion,” and like most Red Lions it had its sign hanging halfway across the road, bearing a presumed likeness of that rampant but strangely coloured beast, holding its claws

outspread and jaws distended, ready to pounce upon the first passenger who came near, or stood to wonder at its formidable appearance.

The landlord was an exceptional landlord, that is, he never interfered with anything his lodger chose to do, but pocketed his money with a growl, and appeared contented to go on in the same way for ever. His lodger was a man after his own heart; *he* never grumbled, but took things as they were, and never murmured if the fare were good, bad, or indifferent, but ate and drank so little, he was about the best paying customer the Lion had ever seen; and as to profit, if he only went on as he began, there was a chance of making a fortune out of him before the year expired.

Little or much, it made no difference! He was pleased with anything; and as to complaining at an overcharge, he would have as soon thought of jumping over the moon, but threw his money down as if it had been dirt, and made so light of it, it was easy to see he had come by it easily, and did not care what became of it; he paid the reckoning without a murmur, and though he was charged for the richest and the best, contented himself with the poorest, and seldom took more than a mutton-chop and a glass of wine at the best of times.

But then he never slept ; did not appear to require rest ; and though he lay in bed till very late, sometimes till after dinner-time, he did not seem much the worse for it, or look an atom paler than when he first came.

Chambermaid was puzzled, but made a nearer guess than any of them as to the cause of his distemper, and might have wormed the secret out, had not Boots been jealous, and forbidden her to go anigh him on any excuse whatever, letting alone making his bed as was her duty ; but beyond that, nothing. He knew what he was about, though he did not choose to say so ; for one night he saw him go out at the inn gate, and look up at the stars so queerly, he felt satisfied that he was a counting of 'em, and had got a bet as to the right number.

But as this could not last for ever, but must wear him out in time, the landlord began to fear that he would go out like the snuff of a candle, and not come back ; go off in his debt, or leave him to lament that such another customer was not to be had for love or money. But as the same thing continued week after week and month after month, the landlady prudently suggested that he should be watched, and an account kept of where he went and what he did ; and on that very night Boots had orders to go out after,

and never lose sight of him till he came back.

But on that very night, as if he had had an inkling of their intention and were determined to baulk it, he actually went to bed at a proper hour, ate a huge breakfast when he got up, despatched half a leg of mutton at dinner, drank a bottle of wine, and altogether made the landlord ask himself the question, if it would be so very paying, after all, if his appetite increased, and he went on at that rate for any length of time.

What could he be thinking of? He had taken a new turn altogether lately, and instead of going out in the middle of the night, he began strolling up and down the streets soon after it was dark, and when the shops were lighted, enjoying a cigar, and lounging from one end of the town to the other, as if he had only recently discovered the beauties of the place, and wanted to write a book about it. There certainly was something the matter with him, but what that something was, neither landlord, landlady, Boots, or chambermaid, had a guess this time.

But one night, when one would have thought he knew the streets by heart, and the whole of the shops, and what they dealt in as well as their owners; after he had walked from end to end, and had looked in at the windows, and taken a good

peep into them, he came to a halt under the gateway of the "Red Lion," and pulling out his watch, looked as if he expected some one to cross from the opposite side, and keep an appointment he or she had made with him.

He had not stayed long, when he observed a smartly dressed young woman cross the road and make a sign to him—though by the way she muffled up her face, she seemed to be rather ashamed of herself, or had a toothache, and was afraid of catching cold.

If she hadn't a toothache, there was something the matter with her, for instead of showing her face, as girls are fond of doing, she held a handkerchief to it, and kept it so completely hidden, it would have been difficult to hazard an opinion as to her age, and if she were young as Spring, or old as Winter, but for her nimbleness, and the remarkably pretty feet peeping under her petticoats, as she tripped across the road, and, at a beckon from Frederick, followed him up a crooked turning leading to the outskirts of the town.

There was a turnstile a little distance up this turning, and fields and orchards on either side; so that the turnstile was as good a place as any for a little private talk, and as it stood just midway, and in a slight bend of the lane, Frederick stopped

as soon as he reached it, and after looking to see that no one was near, waited till she joined him, and then began talking in an undertone to the young woman with the toothache.

Prudent, and wise, and cunning, the young girl listened to what he had to say, and replying in a whisper, kept looking, now up the lane, now down the lane, as if she half expected some one might be watching them, or that some other young man seeing her talking with Frederick at the turnstile, might kick up a dreadful riot the next time he saw her, and vow to have nothing more to do with her.

After a little time passed in whispering, and in speaking of something that appeared to be highly interesting to both of them, Frederick took out his purse, and slipping some money in the girl's hand, looked pleased and happy. So did the girl, and after tying the money in a corner of her handkerchief, she was about making a curtsy—when down that narrow crooked lane she heard a something come! A creaking stealthy footstep, coming on and on, and approaching so softly, it was a wonder she had heard it in time to get away, and not be caught talking to the gentleman.

Without a word—without even saying good-bye, or staying to see who it might be—she

took to her heels and ran ; darted one way, while Frederick went the other, and never ceased running, until she found herself at the other end of the town, escaped by a miracle, and heartily glad she had heard the sound in time, or sure as fate she would have been found out.

She was so exhausted, and so out of breath, she could hardly stand ; but as she had to get home before the other, she knew she had no time to lose, so after waiting a moment to recover herself, she ran off again ; ran at full speed, and trusted to get back without being discovered by that nasty prying fellow, who did nothing but watch and follow her wherever she went.

There was light enough to see that face ; just a glimpse of the moon—when up the handkerchief went again, and off Jane ran again. That same pretty housekeeper's daughter Angus was so fond of, and to whom the moon seemed to have taken a fancy as well, for bursting in a flood of light, and shining on her as she scampered down the road, it never lost sight of her, until she slipped through the little park-gate, and down the avenue, where neither moon nor stars had a chance of being seen.

By what roundabout way Frederick got back to the "Red Lion," is not so sure. But as, for the last few weeks, he had been engaged in dis-

covering the beauties of the neighbourhood, and all about it, it may be supposed that he succeeded, and slipped away without being observed by the person whose footsteps they had heard, and whom it would never do to let know that he met Jane at night, and with what object.

Why he met that little flirt and stood whispering to her by the turnstile was best known to himself; but as he appeared to be unusually happy and contented at the result of his interview, and, smoking his cigar in the gateway of the "Red Lion," smiled as he recalled something she had said to him, it may be imagined that that whispering had been about something of the greatest importance, and their meeting of frequent occurrence—only it was not known.

As if to tell him to leave off that smile, and think of something terrible; to change the expression he now wore to a look of pain and suffering, the Lion creaked and grated in its frame, and swaying backwards and forwards in the wind, kept up a constant sighing, as if to caution him to beware what he was about, and warn him to think better of it before it was too late; then looking reproachfully, shook its mane at him, and, as far as a dumb animal could speak by looking, spoke to him as a friend of the only

“Red Lion” in the town, and endeavoured to put him on his guard.

But as it was rather slow work, smoking and having nothing to do but watch the few people pass, or looking up at the moon ; he thought he might as well stroll up the High Street, and fill up the time twixt that and bedtime by a little exercise, and stretch his legs for want of something better to do.

The High Street was of no great length : it began a hundred yards below the “Red Lion,” and terminated at the milestone at the other end of the town.

The shops were still open, and though the goods and chattels in some of them were not of an attractive character, they might serve him to speculate on their contents, and wonder where those strange old bowls and glasses came from ; who had drank from them, and who had moulded them ; what kind of eyes had pored over the musty volumes he had seen crammed in out-of-the-way corners, or squeezed to fill up gaps between equally worn-out odds and ends of furniture : chair-covers, cushions, sofas, and a heterogeneous mass of former usefulness tumbled in a heap, and left for the poorer community to apply to their more moderate wants—if they could only pay for them.

He did not care for the fine linendrapers, the principal pork shop, or the only bootmaker's—the second-hand shops were more to his mind, where he could feast his eyes on remnants of the time gone by, and wonder what might be their next use, or how long they might last.

The gas-lights, those dim, flaring gas-lights, set a hundred yards apart, barely served to make the way distinct, and but for the lighted shop-fronts, that noble High Street would have been almost invisible. Stopping after he had reached the milestone, he turned about, and strolling back, saw a gentleman looking in at one of those very shops he had just passed, and trying, as it appeared, to read a direction on a card, or a letter, or something he held in his hand, but what he could not see.

The gas-lamps were so bad he was not surprised to find them discarded for the shops, or left to glimmer, by anyone who wished to read, or make out anything he wanted to decipher. But as he had still a good half hour to spare before going indoors he kept on walking; and turning back, thought he might as well go as far as the milestone again, and so home and to bed.

To his surprise, he saw the same tall man again: this time looking in at another window, but still staring in his hand, and poring over

something be held in it, as if trying to make it out. It was of course no affair of his, but he could not help thinking that the man must be either shortsighted or very foolish ; since if he wished to know anything, his best plan would have been to go into the shop and make inquiries, not stand staring there in a state of uncertainty, straining his eyes, and making abominably ugly faces every time he looked.

However, if he chose to look, why let him ; it was no business of his ; and passing on, Frederick soon forgot all about the man, and troubled himself no further about him.

He reached the milestone, tapped it with his stick to remind it he had paid it a second visit, and, walking back, noticed that some of the shops were closed, and the shutters of others being put up before the pork butcher and the bootmaker went to smoke a pipe in one of the inn-parlours, and discuss the politics dear to their hearts. True Blue and Yellow being the prevailing colours in that far-famed country town, and to be stood up for by the rival parties while they had a leg to stand upon.

But under a lamp-post, and having his back towards him, he saw that same tall man again : staring as usual into his hand, and gesticulating so violently, he thought he had escaped from a

lunatic asylum. But the coach had just come in; the horses were being changed when he got to the "Red Lion," and, standing to look at the passengers alight, or others get up, he noticed the glimmer of the lamps, and the red-faced coachman looking over his waybill.

Just as the leaders were put to, and the few people who had congregated about the inn yard to take another look at the coach, were having a talk about the news from London, the King, the Queen, and the rest of the Royal Family—at that particular moment when that living bundle of capes and wrappers, the coachman, had mounted to his box, and the guard had clambered up behind, he saw that same tall man again looking in the passengers' faces, staring here and there, and whenever he thought he detected the person he was in search of, glancing into his hand, and for the hundredth time eyeing about him with provoking persistency.

Leaning with his back against the gatepost, and utterly indifferent to what that man chose to do, or why he kept staring here and there, but always afterwards into his hand, Frederick could hardly help smiling at the eccentricity of his movements, and might have gone on watching him some time longer, had he not moved to get out of the way of the ostlers, and have a good

view of the coach as it went thundering down the street ; when walking forward into the light, he came unexpectedly face to face with the ubiquitous individual at the very moment he was breaking through the crowd of idlers, disappointed by his looks, and for aught he knew, bound for another lamp-post now the shops were closed.

But as he turned and faced him, the man gave a sudden start, grew pale as death, and then as red as fire, as he stared, first at him, then in his hand, and drawing a full breath, stood fiercely confronting him, as if he had a mind to fly at his throat, and strangle him outright.

Surprised, and not a little startled at the man's emotion, and the angry glances he cast at him, Frederiek was about to question him as to what he meant by his extraordinary behaviour, when the man, after glaring at him with a peculiar expression, and a half smile, as if to let him know that he had found him out, at last, he crossed the road, and hiding under a wall, left him to wonder at the strangeness of his conduct, and conclude that he ought not to be trusted by himself, or suffered to go at large without a keeper.

The man was gone when he looked across a few minutes afterwards, and not caring to meet

with him again, or perhaps get into a squabble if he attempted a repetition of his rudeness, Frederick went indoors, retired to his room, and soon after forgot all about the doings of that same tall man, and everything relating to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE WATCH.

RETURNING by the little park gate, and prudently avoiding the ordinary way up to the house, the lodge and the carriage drive, Jane congratulated herself she had given him the slip, and could afford to laugh in her sleeve at his stupid attempt at following her wherever she chose to go out at night and take a walk in the town. She was safe this time; she had got off capitally, and though she had had to run for it, she did not care a pin for that, and if anybody had dared her, would have run the whole way back again as soon as look.

Who cared for his suspicions, or his jealousy either? She didn't, and now, let him go and tell of her as much as he liked, he would get nothing by it. She had done all she wanted; she had arranged everything, and though she might have to go out again soon, she defied him to get the better of her, or interfere with what she chose to do, when she had once made up her mind to it.

A miss was as good as a mile, and though he

had very nearly discovered her, he had not quite ; and delighted to have baulked him for a third time (he had followed her twice before she knew), she went laughing towards the house, and on entering it, met Angus coming out, his everlasting bill-hook on his shoulder, his pipe in his mouth, and his sleepy eyes only half open.

Where in the name of fortune had he come from ? Not from the town ? He could no more have run home first than he could fly ; or granted that he had, he could not look so cool and comfortable, or have had the time to go to sleep—as he evidently had been—while she was gasping still, and so out of breath she could scarcely speak.

But to add to her surprise, and take her breath away completely, he stood still on seeing her, and asking her how she did, wanted to know why she did not go in to supper.

Supper ! and she all but choking with surprise and wonder. It could not be possible ! It could not be true ! Yet looking at him as he leered at her, and seeing by his manner that he was neither cross nor out of temper, she thought to put him off his guard by saying—

“ Oh, I do so wish you had been with me, Angus. Here have I been running half round the park on purpose to see how far I could run,

and do wish you had been with me, that I do, for I hate being out alone."

"I see you have been at something of the sort," replied Angus; "but if I was you, Jane, I wouldn't try it again, for the park ain't over safe at night now those gipsy fellows are about as might take a fancy to you, you know, or do you an injury if they caught you."

"Oh, they wont hurt me," Jane said, carelessly.

"Don't you be so sure of that. Them fellows ain't to be trusted, and for aught I know, a pretty girl ain't to be trusted neither. Only don't try the park at night again, that's all, and don't be so over certain you wont be laid hold of when you least expect it, if you do."

"But suppose I went to meet my sweetheart? You would not surely say I oughtn't to walk out then?"

"Yes, but I do," replied Angus, after a twinge, and as though Jane and her sweetheart were not exactly what he wished to hear about—"I say it ain't a proper thing, and as to a sweetheart, ain't one as good as a dozen, and Angus better than a black-muzzled gipsy, or a long-legged fellow in a long-skirted coat?"

"But suppose I had a gentleman-sweetheart, and not a gipsy, who was fond of me, and wished

to come up to the house to see me? What then?"

"There ain't no followers allowed, and if you want 'em to come, why they can't, that's all. Them's master's orders, and gentleman or no gentleman, Angus knows better than disobey him."

"But suppose——"

"I don't suppose nothing of the sort; and if so be as you have taken a fancy to him, why tell him not to come nigh here, that's all. It ain't master's wish, and it ain't my wish, if it comes to that; so don't expect it of me; for I'd drop down dead before I'd neglect my duty, or go against what master tells me."

"But it don't follow you would do all he told you if you disliked it, does it?"

"I'd cut my right hand off—provided it didn't go to be my death—but I'd do my duty and obey him. It's what I ought to do, and do it I will, let Jane and her gentleman say no as much as they like, or that gipsy thief say no, or mistress say no—not that she's a mistress of mine, nor's ever like to be; but wholly and solely Angus is master's, and master may do as he likes; so there's an end of that."

"And of all coaxing too," thought Jane, as Angus moved sulkily away and left her to her

own reflections. She did not find them so pleasing as she could wish when, on going indoors, she learnt that he had never once been out, but, in consequence of her mother's illness, had been permitted to take his ease in the chimney-corner, and eat his supper in the kitchen, which as a rule he objected to when Mrs. Botcherby was on the alert; for she managed to make herself so disagreeable, he seemed to *préfer* taking his meals with the dogs to sitting down in her company.

But if Angus had been asleep how could he have watched her? and if he had not, how came it she had been followed for three successive nights, and watched from the time she left the house till she came back again?

It could not, surely, be her master? What motive could he have for suspecting her? and even if he thought he had, he would never be so mean as to go stealing after her, lying in wait, and dodging about to ascertain if she met any one or took a walk with a young man, or did anything, in short, that as a single young woman she had a right to do, without asking leave of anybody.

It was all very well for Angus. He was a mere nobody, and being her fellow-servant, and rather sweet upon her, might fancy he had a

right to be jealous, and to see if he had a rival it might be worth his while to challenge, and try who was the better man. But for her master! for him to go following her night after night, and hiding in dark corners on purpose to find out what she was about, the idea was preposterous! and yet she could not help thinking that he had watched her, or if he had not, she could not tell who had.

He could not possibly have discovered where she first met that young man, or seen him speaking to her and inquiring after her mistress in such a beseeching manner she had not the heart to turn away, or refuse to listen to his request, that she would tell him all about her, and never say a word to anyone of his having asked her to ease his broken heart by informing him of what she knew. He never could have heard of that, nor of her having encountered him by accident one morning when, on getting up very early to take a walk, she had met him by appointment just outside the park, and on telling him something that seemed to please him found he had slipped five sovereigns into her hand, to buy a new dress, as he said, but in reality to coax her into telling more about her mistress than he had yet heard: that dear, kind mistress, who, as the young gentleman said,

most touchingly, he had hoped, alas ! to call his wife.

But then, suppose her master *had* found her out, and *had* discovered his wife's lover hiding close at hand, what then ? Oh, it would never do to think of that, for fear of the dreadful stir that would be made if it were found out. It was as much as her place was worth to do anything he disliked ; and as to his wife !—Heaven help the poor dear lady !—it was more than *her life* was worth to go against him, though Heaven knew she was innocent of all intention to deceive him, as she knew well enough, and only wished she'd be guided by her ; she'd soon let her master see what it was to trample on her, and treat her as if she were so much dirt under his feet.

If it were her master (and she was afraid it was) he must have had some powerful motive for suspecting her, and had no doubt followed her, not from curiosity, but because he had found her out, and knew more about the young man at the “Red Lion” than she supposed. But she had given him the slip, that was one comfort ; and unless he had actually caught her with him, and seen her speaking to him, she defied him to prove she had, and, what was more, was not such a fool as to confess it, even though he threatened to kill her, or discharge her without a character.

She was sitting thinking about all this, and prepared to meet her master with a flat denial if he taxed her with having gone out to meet the gentleman, when she heard him come into the house, and thanked her lucky stars she had got home before him. There was no knowing what might have happened if she had not, for she heard him inquire if the servants were all indoors, and then go muttering upstairs, in about as bad a humour as it was possible for a man to be in.

He ate nothing—did not seem to wish for anything; but leaving word for Angus to be with him early in the morning, went up to his room and pretended to go to bed. But Jane was not to be imposed upon by a sham like that, and knowing that he would not feel inclined to sleep if he had really found out anything about the gentleman at the “Red Lion” and herself, she tried to keep awake by thinking of her mistress and that handsome young man who was dying for love of her, and who looked so woe-begone she hoped and trusted she should be able to assist him as she had promised, and not get found out until it was too late to prevent it.

But in the dead of night—long after she had been asleep, and dreaming of goodness knows what—she heard her master moving about the house,

open a window, and then go creaking up and down the stairs, until she began to fear something dreadful was going to happen, or some deed of darkness about to be committed worse than she had ever heard of. It was no use talking ! Sleep with her head out of the bedclothes she could not, so she put it under, and never woke till it was broad daylight and time to get up.

But in that dead of night, when sound was hushed, and the profound calm of midnight fell on the sleeping earth, then was the time to watch and wait, to observe each stealthy shadow as it passed, or, sheltered under the trees, see it look up and mark her signal ; see it signal in return ; or, warned not to approach, notice it steal off to come some other time when he was away and not expected home.

He knew he must be somewhere lying in wait, anxiously expecting the waving of a handkerchief, a light at the window, or some signal concerted between them. He had no doubt now, no picture to be jealous of, and no imaginary cause for hatred and revenge, but the man himself ! That dark-eyed sybarite, that full-lipped, smooth-faced lover he had seen hiding in the town, and waiting for some message from her go-between ; trusting to arrange a meeting through her, and take suspicion off herself in case she should be discovered.

But he had seen him, that was one comfort ; and knowing where he lay, prepared to welcome him and greet him with a reception less warm, perhaps, than his wife would give, but not the less lasting and secure. Let him but come—come hoping and rejoicing—he'd find the trap so daintily prepared and the bait so tempting, who knew how soon he might fall into it, and take a fool's leap in the dark, drop into the jaws of death, and no one know who struck the blow, if he only succeeded in persuading Angus to do what he wished.

And had he loved her then for this? Loved her, and worshipped her, and hidden her away from all eyes but his own, hoping to make her doubly fond, and anxious to cherish him alone. Instead of which how had she used him?—abused, deceived, and cheated him—made him the scape-goat to her own desires, and wilfully imposed on his credulity by pretending a love she never felt. And now when he had found her out, had sounded the depth of her duplicity, and by an unexpected accident had discovered the extent of her deceit, had she not endeavoured still further to impose upon him by enticing her lover where he could be summoned to meet her the moment his back was turned, and be ready to fly to her embrace?

It was worse than death, keener than a knife held to the throat, and more cruel to endure

than the worst of torments perpetrated in the name of religion or of war. Nothing could exceed the venom rankling in that jealous wound imposed upon himself, and no revenge he thought too merciless to meet the occasion, now he had found out the extent of his wrongs, and was prepared to think that his wife had purposely designed to inflict them on him.

Yet in the midst of all his passion, his thirst for vengeance, and his intense longing to vent his rage upon the man he felt had wronged him, his love for his wife absorbed all other feelings and made him doubtful of what he ought to do, hoping she might be less guilty than he supposed, or not so guilty as to draw on her the full extent of his indignation and revenge. His wife, his beautiful and accomplished wife! His idol and his unselfishly beloved, the woman he had chosen to fill his heart up with content, waiting perhaps some signal from her lover, or laying schemes to dishonour him.

But on going to her chamber, half hoping and yet half dreading to discover some proofs of her hatred to him and love to another, he found her in bed and fast asleep—sleeping so calmly and so innocently, it looked like sin to doubt her as she lay, or tax that sleeping beauty with a vice. Then as he looked and saw that snow-white

hand laid by her side, her head upon the pillow, and that pale sad face upturned in all its beauty and its calm, he felt the old attraction, and, spell-bound by her loveliness, stood to pause and to reflect why she could not love him as he loved her.

She lay so motionless, so placid and so calm, she looked more like a pictured death than life. No sigh escaped her, no deep-drawn breath, but, breathing softly as an infant, slumbered in peace ! Her blue enamelled veins shining through her soft white hands, her whiter neck conveying from the fountain of her heart the blood that fed her life, and inspiring the beholder with emotions almost holy as he beheld that human creature so perfect in her beauty, she more resembled our idea of angels than an earthly form.

Shadowing the light so as to throw a mellow tint upon her marble flesh, he stood to watch her as she slept, and gazing on her never drew his eyes away, until disturbed as it would seem by the light shining on her, she shifted a little on one side, then throwing her arms across her breast conveyed the notion to his jealous mind that even in her sleep she shrank from him, turned from him with a shudder, or sweetly dreaming, recalled the image of that other one, and smiled with only thinking of him.

A faint low murmur, a deep-drawn sigh, and all was still. She slept and never stirred; then feeling certain that she could neither see nor hear him, he removed the light, stole softly from the chamber, and going to his dressing-room took up a gun, charged it and rammed the bullet home, put out the light, then feeling his way in the dark, passed through a second chamber, and stood at last in the drawing-room facing the lawn, where, as he fully expected, her lover would soon come.

He could see nothing. A saturating mist had risen since he came indoors—a steam-like damp passing as a veil between the outside objects and himself, and obscuring even the outline of the nearest thing.

Throwing the window open and gazing on that rising mist, he saw it float into the room, and felt it strike upon his face with a wet cold chill. It fell on everything, and hung in clouds above the earth, rolling and floating and spreading far away into the space beyond.

But as he stood to watch that mist, its shifting masses and its floating steam, he saw above the haze, the tree-tops lifted over what appeared to be a restless tossing sea of vapour, and then began to think upon the sea itself, the eventful courses he had run, and that last fatal voyage when the *Nancy* had gone down.

There was the same monotony, the same dead calm of thought, and the same uncertainty to contend against, either by looking from that window or by gazing from a deck. But soft ! was not that a footstep, and that moving object the figure of a man ? It was ! he saw him distinctly now ; and thinking it might be the one he hated he raised his gun to fire.

No. It was fancy, a diseased imagination, or the result of looking so long into the mist trying to get at what he expected would be sure to come. He shut the window, put down the gun, then, stepping lightly, stole from the room, and once again appearing to be imitating the stealthy movement of the tiger, crossed the palm-leaves worked upon the carpet, closed the door, and went downstairs.

Had he, in passing from that room, reflected on the time he had stolen upon his wife, and left the room as he now did, on tiptoe, and fearing to be heard ; or did he dwell only on the object he had in view, and, steadfastly determined, prepare to act up to his design, and carry out to the bitter end the revenge he had in view ? Had he no remorse, no wavering of conscience ; or thinking only of his wrongs, and his wife's perfidy, did he resolve to punish her through him, and break the heart he could not win ?

It was past midnight—past it' long ago ; and knowing that the stillest hour of the night had come, he thought himself seeure, and though afraid of being heard by restless sleepers, or by some one waked up suddenly, he knew that he had better chances now, and that the creaking of the stairs would be less likely to attract attention, if he avoided making the least other noise, and stole down softly, with pauses between each footstep.

He reached the corridor, and groping his way by feeling along the wall, he came at last upon the old poreh-door, and gently withdrawing the bolts, turned the handle, stepped outside, and all at once became enveloped in that cold damp mist lying thicker here than in the front of the house.

It was a dense black fog, hanging about the trees, and growing thicker and more stifling every step he took. Drawing his coat over his chest, he walked towards the outside room, but stopped, as he saw the figure of a man shoot past, and disappear as suddenly as he came.

Who could it be ? A thief, or that same lurking lover he had watched for so long, and thought to shoot down as a trespasser ? He would have had a better excuse now ; and had he had his gun with him, could have shot him as he passed,

and said he caught the fellow trying to break open the house, and felt justified in shooting him.

Taken unawares, and before he could recover his surprise, he missed the opportunity to follow and lay hold of him, and now it was too late! He was gone. The fog had favoured his escape, and enabled him to get away, leaving him baulked and disappointed to think that he had got off so easily.

But Angus was asleep in that outside room, and as he wished to speak with him, it became him to be doubly cautious not to make a noise, but to rouse him softly, to knock gently, and should he succeed in waking him, to send him in search of the fellow he had seen, before speaking of what he had come about, and hoped to persuade him to attempt.

He was asleep, and snoring so loudly, he had to knock and knock again, rattle at the door, and call to him before he could wake him up, or make him aware who wanted him.

He heard him moving now, and a shuffling along the floor in proof that he was coming to ask who called. But before he could prepare for him or say a word, the door flew open, and Angus rushing out, stood with his bill-hook in his hand, ready to ward off an attack or fell an opponent to the ground.

“Down with that weapon, and run out at once ; look among the trees, and if you see any one lurking about, take the law into your own hands and do what you like with him. There is a thief about, and you had better be quick or he will be off.”

At the first sound of his master's voice, Angus stood before him utterly confounded ; but on being told what to do, he swung his bill-hook round, and dashing out went groping among the trees and bushes, cut at anything he thought might be a thief, but finding no one, came back after a fruitless search, to say—

“It's no use, master, he's got off this time ; and if it's the chap I suspect, won't come back now he knows there's some one after him who owes him a grudge, and ain't likely to forget it either, as he knows well enough after the message I sent him.”

“What do you mean ?”

“Why, that black-muzzled gipsy thief as we saw talking to the fellow with the long skirts and the long legs out in the park that night. If it was any one, master, it was him sure enough, prowling about to see what he could lay his hands on.”

In his haste to open the door, and catch, as he thought, that same worthy to whom he had

alluded, skulking about the house, Angus had slipped on enough to cover him but nothing more, thinking to take him in the fact, and punish him according to his deserts. The night was damp, and standing before his master shivering with cold, he was told to get into bed again, for he had something to say to him, and might not have another opportunity of talking to him about it for some time to come.

That said something must be a matter of consequence, or his master would never have taken the trouble to come out purposely to see him, and rouse him in the middle of the night; so he offered to strike a light, and make the room a little more lively and comfortable to sit in, but on Ellerton's telling him to be quick and bolt the door (but to look about first, and be sure that no one was watching), he got into bed, and did as he was bid.

"I told you I had something to say to you," said Ellerton, sitting on the bed to which Angus had betaken himself, "and as you may have an opportunity of rendering me an important service, and of proving the gratitude you have often professed, I hope you will listen to me attentively, so that there may be no misunderstanding between us, nor for you afterwards to say you had no time to reflect, but, taken off your guard,

promised to do what you did not like to perform."

Angus made his usual reply, that he was ready to do anything his master wished, and that he knew his duty too well not to be anxious to obey him, and do anything he required of him without asking questions why or wherefore ; then listening attentively to what his master said, he remained talking with him, till streaming through the grated window the grey of morning broke up their conversation, and left the master and the man to go to sleep afterwards—if they could.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOWN ON THE NAIL.

BUT Angus could not sleep, he had too much on his mind just then, and during the whole of the next day he looked dull and restless, kept talking to himself, and out of humour with everybody, hardly replied when spoken to, or took account of anything.

There was no getting him to say a civil word, and as for a smile you might as soon have expected a death's head to smile, for he did nothing but sit upon a stile, cast his eyes upon the ground, and argue with himself whether he ought to obey his master or run away and leave him to himself.

He had certain conscientious scruples working in him which he had to get the better of before he could be prevailed upon to carry out his master's wishes, or do what he required. He could not bear the thought of disobeying him, and then again he did not quite like the notion of putting his neck in a halter solely to oblige him, and as his life was what he cared most about and was for ever thinking of, there is no

saying how long he might have hesitated had he not reflected that he should not have had the opportunity of caring for it at all but for his master, who had risked his own life to save his.

He defied any one to say he did not love his master, or would object to do him a service. He would have walked half over the world, done his bidding without a murmur, and never complained of want of food nor anything to see him look pleased and contented with him. But when it came to dying, or what was almost as bad, running the chance of dying, it was time to look about and think twice before he complied with his request. It was all very well talking and saying there was no fear. But there was fear, there was a very great deal of fear, and Angus for one was not the man to put his neck in jeopardy merely for the pleasure of the thing, or to show he did not so much care about it so long as he got another off.

But then his master spoke so earnestly and made such a point of his doing what he asked, he did not know how to refuse, although he had told him point blank over and over again he could not do it, and that it was of no use asking him; then begging him to think twice what he was about, even went so far as to tell him to his face that he had no right to think of such a thing, or

to call on him to risk his life in doing the devil's own work and breaking God's command to man.

It was of no use. He would not listen to him, and still harping on his want of gratitude, urged it so much, that at last he well-nigh consented, and left him with a half promise to try and make up his mind to serve him, though it went against his conscience, and he knew he would be sure to suffer for it in the long run.

Thus talking to himself and looking at the question on all sides, Angus had been sadly put to it to know what to do, and avoiding everybody, he went out and buried himself in the hollow where he had seen his master lie, and seated on the rank grass, began to reflect on what he had said, and to try and make up his mind either to do what he wished, or leave it alone, and say no more about it.

Jane had been looking for him everywhere ; in the house and out of the house, but could not set eyes on him ; she never saw him the livelong day but once, and then he treated her scandalously ; told her not to bother him, but leave him alone, for he had other matters to think of just then, and was not in a humour to be troubled with her nonsense. Only to think of that ! and Jane smiling so sweetly ; if he had had a heart of stone it must have melted it ! But no !

he would have nothing to say to her, and when she followed him, he ran away, and left her in a boiling passion, to think that of all days, he should have slighted her on this, and not have listened to what she had to say. The purport of which would have been, to coax him into keeping out of the way, at a time she particularly wished he could have been a hundred miles away, and not lounging near the house after his usual custom.

Her master had gone to London by the early morning coach. She had a capital chance, and might not have another for goodness knew when ! All was prepared, and if she could only invent an excuse to get rid of Angus, matters promised so favourably, she flattered herself that she should be able to do what she had promised, and get it all over before the coach came back, or her master could return from London, where he had been compelled to go on business of the greatest importance.

She had arranged as she thought everything to her satisfaction, and fully calculated on getting rid of Angus when the time came. But as he would not even speak to her, but running off, left her on the outskirts of the wood, she thought she must try and manage some other way ; blind him by some artifice, and so completely put him

off his guard, that he would not have the least suspicion what she was about, but be as completely hoodwinked as his master.

She had gone as far back as the meadow on her return home, and on reaching the stile saw a couple of fellows sitting on it and talking to one another, where they had no right to talk, but should have looked at the notice posted outside the park, warning trespassers to beware of spring guns, man traps, and proceedings according to law, to be taken against any one who ventured to intrude upon its limits, or was found trespassing where he had no business.

Sitting at their ease and taking no notice of her, nor of her wish to get over the stile, and to get over it without showing more of her ankles than she could help, Jane naturally supposed that, seeing a lady waiting to get over, the men would turn their backs, or pretend to turn them, and not keep looking like a couple of impudent fellows, talking all kinds of nonsense, and making remarks positively shocking. But she got over somehow, and making believe that she had not heard a word or even seen them, kept on her way, and never turned to look at them until she was quite a dozen yards away, when she thought she would let them see what she thought of them, and turning up her nose stared at them indig-

nantly, called them a couple of "wretches," and only wished her big brother was there to knock their heads together, or lock them up, and teach them how to behave themselves.

But as the men only laughed and called after her, and wished to know if she fancied the light one or the dark one, and how long it would take for her to make up her mind, Jane turned her back on them again; tossed her head to let them see what she thought of them, and with all imaginable dignity walked slowly off; but on getting out of sight ran like lightning, and sitting down when close at home, had a good cry, and only wished she was a man, that was all, she'd soon let 'em see what it was to insult an unprotected female, or make game at her on getting over a stile.

The two men still sat, and as soon as Jane was out of sight, they began to talk again, and discuss the several matters her appearance had brought to a standstill. One of the men, although having a jaded look, and a done up, worn-out appearance, was less repulsive than the other, and had the appearance of a cattle-dealer, or a half and half farmer. His drab great-coat looked rather the worse for wear, his cap seemed flabby, and his general appearance betokened travel by sea and land, from which he had but recently returned.

His companion, like most of his class, lounged lazily on the stile, and knocking a thick stick against the heel of his boot, did not appear in so good a humour as he might have been at being cross-questioned and brow-beaten by his companion, who, assuming a right to catechise him, took him to task, and expressed his dissatisfaction in no measured terms.

“ You ain’t half sharp enough,” he said, in accents peculiar to the north; “ nor quick enough to see a chance when it stares you in the face, but mack a laboursome job of what a keelman would open his mouth at an’ swallow like a gnat. Here have you been a month an’ more strainin’ an’ strainin’, an’ jabberin’ an’ jabberin’, instead of crackin’ the nut an’ gettin’ at the kernal. Oh, it’s a langsome job you mack of it, an’ I must ha’ been daft not to tack the matter in hand mysel, instead o’ trustin’ it to a gipsy, who has as much notion of expedition as a lobster o’ turnin’ red a’ter he’s boiled.”

“ Why don’t you then?” replied the other, still lounging over the stile.

“ Why don’t I? Why, because I mack a rule not to keep a dog an’ bark mysel. That’s why I don’t; an’ you glaver like a gonnerhead as you are, to mack an observation a hinny of sax

years old would be ashamed on. If I had done it mysel, I should not ha' paid you to do it for me, that's sartin; an' a'ter all I had better a' kept my brass in my poeket perhaps than hear it jingle in yours, an' no gude come of it for all your crackin', an' your makin' believe you could open him like a portmantle, or an oyster—an' come at the bottom of him quick as a stane goes to the bottom of a well."

"You ain't no patience," said the other, with a shrug.

"I ain't no patience, ma' be, when I see week a'ter week go by an' my gude money runnin' a'ter bad at a most awfu' rate. I ain't no patience, ma' be, when I hear what you ha' to say, an' how you say it, as if you'd mack a pund out of every word, an' drain me of more brass to mack you stir, an' not go dribble-brabbin' like a dobbie, or a heerin' that was too proud to be catched."

"It ain't that I'm proud, an' it ain't that I'm a fool. It's more like the boot's on the other foot. But what's a man to do when you can't get at him, or make him talk, though you tries your hardest. He's always a' sleepin' or a snorin', an' how's a fellow to get it out of him then, I should like to know, or do what you make a brag of havin' paid for? Didn't I tell you

what the old man said—leastways as much as I could catch—an' wasn't that worth a somethin'? Warn't that better nor nothin', and warn't I bad enough paid when you guv me a crown, and promised another, which you never guv?"

Urged out of his natural apathy by the north countryman's abuse, the gipsy had been roused into a speech of more than ordinary length, and flattening his cap upon his head and pulling at the shock of hair on either side, he buried his hands in his breeches pockets, and rattled some halfpence in them, as if to show his independence, and to prove to the other that he could do without his help.

"Who said you didna tell me? Who said you hadna a job to persuade the fellow to keep his eyes open, an' mack him sensible of a somethin' for his gude if he'd only listen to it? It warn't that I found fote with, but for your not ferritin' him out, an' gettin' hold of him when he was by himsel, an' no one by to hear what you said to him."

"And ain't I tried it? Didn't I try it hard last night, and thought to come at him, a'ter the worritin' I've had, when who should come out but the master! and sent me scamperin' off for fear he should look hard at me, and guess a somethin' of what the old chap told him on

—of how he fell into a ditch one night when he was drunk, and split his head open.”

“An’ if you did run off, could you no go back again and listen to what they said, which was no doubt somethin’ special, and deservin’ of the best attention on your part to find out.”

“I tell you I ain’t going to run my head against a wall to please you, nor come across the master nearer than I can help. But ain’t there no other means of gettin’ hold on him, and makin’ him talk of what you want? If so be as he’s the right chap, why not drop on him at once and make a bargain with him? If you want to sell a horse, it ain’t no good tellin’ how you come by it. Your business is to sell and get your money, and let the chap get it back again if he can, that’s all.”

“As for gettin’ my money back again, I think that’s likely. Though it’s an awfu’ lot of brass I’ve had to spend, travellin’ to forrin parts, journeyin’ an’ payin’ fees, an’ makin’ presents—as you know weel enough, to the injury of my property. It’s a few more bits of information I want. A few questions answered by this Angus, an’ then, Dan Bostock ma’ mack a silver penny out o’ a brass ’un, an’ not mack so bad a bargain of it a’ter all.”

The gipsy made no reply, but rattling his

halfpence, he leant against the stile and stared provokingly at the grass.

He required a refresher, and the other knew it.

“Look ye!” said the Northumbrian, equally cute with the gipsy, and knowing quite as well how to make a bargain. “Sellin’ a secret an’ sellin’ a horse depends on what can be made by it; an’ sin’ you ha’ had upwards of ten pund already, I think it’s time you did somethin’ more for it than tellin’ me what old Daniel said, first by the side of the fire, an’ next when he war dyin’. It’s more I expect of you than a scrap of paper or two as you could no’ read, an’ something more than doin’ nothin’, or listenin’ at a door when the lock could be picked, an’ this thick-headed fellow drawn like a badger to tell you the secret of his broughtage-up. It’s that I want to know. Now, if you only find that out, an’ lose no time about it, I’ll gi’ you a couple of pund, an’ owe you ten pund more to that when it’s a’ settled, an’ my gude money has come home to pay me for the bad.”

“Done,” said the gipsy, “done and double done. You only keep out of the way, I’ll manage what you want, and will either get at the right side of his head or tug his ears off. You only keep out of sight and leave me to manage a’ter my own way, we’ll soon come to a

reckonin' of the ten pound and the couple too. Ready money, this time, mind you. Down on the nail, and no horse-couperin' with me, or I'll split on you and show your tricks up to the master."

No more was said. The money was paid. The north countryman buttoned his pocket, and the gipsy, placing the money in a safe depository, walked away in company with his friend, until they reached the entrance of the wood, where they separated, the gipsy going towards the camping-ground in the old green lanes, and the north countryman wheresoever his inclination or his business called him. But as he took the turning leading to the road, it may be supposed that he was making for his lodging in the country town, to dine off a beefsteak, sup on bread and cheese, and keep a sharp look-out on what was next to come.

The gipsy had promised to do what he required. The earnest money had been paid, and a further sum promised. But had the Northumbrian waited by the stile a little longer, he might have saved his money, and seen the person he was inquiring after steal out of the wood, but by a different pathway to the one the gipsy had taken after he left him.

He did not seem in much better spirits now

than before, for he walked very slowly, hung down his head, and on getting near the stile, stood leaning over it with the air of a man a good deal troubled. But after he had sat on it, and cogitated some time longer, he appeared to have made up his mind; went off at a quicker pace, and on reaching the Avenue, threw himself among the roots, and after looking about in all directions, thought he had hit upon a place that would suit his purpose admirably.

If he could only slip out of the house, and manage to get there without being seen, he defied the sharpest pair of eyes that were ever set in a woman's head to find him out. The rabbits had burrowed among the roots to such a depth, that with a little extra scooping out of the earth he could lie up to his neck almost, or peep out of the bushes, and observe any one pass up or down the Avenue without their being aware they were watched by some one who knew more of their business than was good for their health.

Let him once be certain they were after no good, and that his master's suspicions were well founded, they had better look to themselves, that was all, or as sure as they were born they would repent it now he had resolved to obey his master and do what he asked him, if he could only do it without being found out.

CHAPTER XIX.

JANE KEEPS HER APPOINTMENT.

AFTER making the discovery that his wife's lover was in the neighbouring town, waiting, as he thought, an opportunity to arrange a meeting with her, it was not likely that Ellerton would have gone to London willingly, or have left his house at the time of all others when he knew he ought to observe her movements more narrowly than ever.

There was no help for it. Go he must; or submit to the penalties sure to be enforced were he to neglect the summons he had received to give evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons on matters relating to a new Bill before Parliament respecting the settlement of compensation claims on Jamaica property. Nothing could have happened more unfortunately; but as it was imperative that he should go, he thought he had provided against contingencies, and left a guard behind who would protect his interests and carry out the instructions he had given when sitting by his bedside and whispering what he wished him to do.

He had seen enough, as he thought, to satisfy himself that his wife and her lover were in league against him, and secretly plotting his dishonour; and though he had no evidence of their actual guilt, he was convinced that they had planned to take advantage of his absence and arranged a meeting agreeable to them both. His wife was no doubt fully aware of the time he would have to leave and of the time he would return, and therefore (presuming her to be bent on deceiving him) she could mature her plans and prevent his knowing anything about it.

And would he quietly consent to play the dupe, and take no steps to unmask or punish them? He could not avoid going to London, but he could at all events set a watch upon their movements, and take the only measures he had in his power to render their intentions futile. He could do more than that. He could prevent suspicion lighting on himself if the worst came to the worst, and Angus carried out his instructions. He would be then entirely relieved from all blame in the matter, and no suspicion attach itself to him; for he would not be seen in it, and could not be held responsible for what might take place during his absence.

But could he depend upon him? Might they not tamper with him, or might not his heart fail

him when it came to the push? He had no other means of detecting his wife nor of venting his indignation on her lover in the way he desired but through his agency, and therefore he thought to appease his conscience by thinking that the vengeance he designed they had brought upon themselves, and that they would have only themselves to thank for what might follow.

He would not willingly have left his wife to be tempted, or given her the opportunity to deceive him; but he could not disguise from himself the anxiety he felt to discover if she were really as guilty as he supposed, or only culpable of a want of affection towards him. He loved her, but he doubted her; and as he had now lost what little confidence he once had in her, he thought the time had come when he could try her thoroughly; set his fears at rest, or utterly discard her.

Giving her the full benefit of the doubt that his suspicions might be ill-founded, he determined to keep his absence secret (not that he supposed for one moment she was not fully informed of all that had taken place, and that her lover knew of it as well), and therefore gave it out that he was going a short distance but would soon return; then observing, as he thought, a smile upon her face, felt confident she was equally willing to be

tempted as her lover was to tempt, and resolved to act upon his original design entrusted to Angus to fulfil.

Ellerton did all things as he had arranged after he had roused up Angus and told him what he wished, and soon after daylight he went by a roundabout way into the town to avoid being seen by the servants, and congratulated himself he had contrived it admirably ; then stepping into the coach just as it was changing horses, he drew his cloak over his face, and sitting in a corner, glanced stealthily at the windows of the Red Lion to observe if any one was there watching him.

There was no one about at that early hour ; none but the ostler and the helps, and he was safe so far ; and feeling confident in the arrangements he had made, he threw himself back in his seat and relaxed into a gloomy smile. But as the coach rolled on, and long before the next stage had been reached, he grew restless and uneasy, and began to fear that he had not taken sufficient precaution, or that, after all, Angus might betray him to his wife, and fail to execute what he had promised.

If he had only thought of it he could have walked down the road and let the coach overtake him a mile or two away. That would have prevented the possibility of its being buzzed abroad

that he had gone to London—that is, in case his movements had not been watched. How was he to know that his wife had not been equally cunning with himself, and had had him followed to find out where he went in order to make sure of him. It was quite in keeping with her character, quite consistent with her ordinary duplicity, and he felt he should be no match for her where she had once made up her mind to get the better of him.

But by the time the coach arrived at the next stage he appeared to have hit upon an idea that afforded him some comfort in the midst of his despondency, and hastily alighting he called the landlord of the posting-house on one side, and speaking hurriedly and in a whisper, made him thoroughly understand his instructions; then took his seat in the coach, and at the end of the next stage got out again, consulted with the second landlord, and so on, until he arrived in London, where he repeated his orders at the inn where he put up; and getting into a hackney coach drove towards Westminster, feeling confident in the success of his arrangements, and that his wife would after all be detected in her treachery if his directions were only carried out.

The coach left London at five o'clock. It did

not get back till ten ; but as he had arranged it, he hoped to be able to arrive at home an hour at least before he was expected, if the innkeepers obeyed his instructions and had all ready for a mount.

But he was gone, that was one comfort ; and Jane, notwithstanding anything that Angus could do to the contrary, was fully prepared to put her design into execution, and get the better of him by some means or other. Her master could not return till ten o'clock. There was plenty of time till then, and before he came back there was no reason, as far as she could see, why they could not despatch their business and get the meeting over long before he returned.

It would of course be easier if Angus had consented, or did not take it into his stupid head to be uncommonly sharp and active for once in his life. He was an obstinate, ill-conditioned fellow, as she knew, or he would have made up to her when he had a chance—and she had given him one that very morning—but if he would not, why she must do without him : and began to think that it was better as it was, if she could only persuade her mistress not to set her face against her doing what she thought would make her happy. .

But then, womanlike, she was afraid of a

woman ; and did not know whether to speak to her mistress beforehand or let her find it out when it was too late to make much stir about it. In this state of uncertainty, longing to speak, yet afraid to speak, she came to the conclusion that it would be unreasonable in her mistress to be angry with her for doing her a kindness, and as she would not be a consenting party she could not for the life of her believe she would be so foolish as to object to receive a visit from the young gentleman staying at the Red Lion, if he only kept his appointment—as of course he would—and remained true to his promise never to breathe a syllable of having been admitted to the house, or of her having helped him to a sight of her mistress.

Now Jane was desperately in love herself, and having a fellow feeling with any one in a similar position, would have done anything in her power to help her mistress to cheat her husband, or the young gentleman to obtain a sight of her. That she had lost her heart was certain, and had lost it in a most extraordinary manner, by going into the High Street at night to meet the young gentleman, and talk to him of her mistress's unhappiness, and of her husband's cruel conduct to her ; all through his being jealous of her, and fancying she was thinking of some one who was *not* her husband.

The mail came in about the time she usually went into the town to meet the young gentleman, and on two successive nights she had been much struck by the magnificent appearance of the guard, as he swung down from "the dickey," or climbed up into it; and as gilt buttons and a scarlet coat were not to be seen every day (the military station being a long way off), she gave in at once, and thinking that she had never set her eyes on such an angelic being as the guard in all her life, fell desperately in love with him then and there.

But then he was always in such a hurry; looking after somebody's box or helping somebody down, that he had hardly time to wink, when he saw her staring at him, much less to speak to her; so that she did not see the slightest chance of getting to talk with him unless she gave up her place, and spent the whole of her savings in riding backwards and forwards, for the pleasure of hearing him blow on his horn, and cry "all right" at every place the coach changed horses.

Setting aside her own desire, and her love for the guard, Jane was resolved to keep her word, and not disappoint the young gentleman, let what would come of it. It was of no use thinking if it were right or wrong. She

had given her word, and did not mean to break it.

It was almost time to think of her appointment, and as her master would be sure to return by ten o'clock, the sooner she kept it the better. It was getting dark, and as she had to put on her bonnet and shawl, she went indoors to get herself ready, and to her delight, saw Angus sitting in the chimney corner, and so fast asleep, there did not seem much chance of his waking for another hour at least.

The moment he did wake, she knew he would go out upon his rounds, but in a contrary direction to the one she proposed taking, to warn off trespassers, or lay in wait for them. Any way he was welcome to but the one she was going, and the further off the better she should like it; for though he seldom went towards the Avenue by night, she began to be alarmed lest he might possibly go there that very night, out of spite, and as if on purpose to interfere with her arrangements.

She watched him sleeping in his corner, then slipping out of doors, congratulated herself that he was safe for the present anyhow; but felt so nervous now the time had come, she almost regretted having consented to the young gentleman's request for fear of the consequences, and

the risk she ran of losing her place if found out.

It was pitch dark: so dark she had some difficulty in finding the way, but on reaching the entrance of the Avenue, the sight of the gloomy trees, and the black gulf of an archway formed by their boughs, struck a chill into her, and made her tremble to put her foot inside, for do what she would, she could not help fancying that the black vault of the archway looked like a gigantic mouth, stretched wide open, and ready to swallow her up the moment she got into it.

There was no seeing anything there, and though she had been along the Avenue at all hours, hundreds and hundreds of times, she had never seen it look so dismal and solitary before, and positively trembled when she thought that she should have to go all the way down it by herself, and stand the chance of tripping over some of the roots, or of meeting some of the ghosts with which it was said to be haunted.

Right in the centre of the Avenue lay a nasty hollow, of which she had always had a fear, and took particular care to avoid. But how was she to avoid it when she could hardly see her hand, and had to mind what she was about to prevent her clothes being dragged off her back by the

nasty briars pulling at her, catching her dress, and sticking in her hands like fish-hooks.

She had got some distance down the Avenue, when to her horror she saw, as she thought, something steal across, and then stoop down and disappear among the bushes. If it wasn't a ghost she had never seen a ghost in her life, and though she had always pretended not to care for them, and said she did not believe in them, there was no doubt about it this time, and shrieking till the place echoed, she flew off like lightning, and darting along the Avenue would soon have reached the other end, had she not tripped over a started root, and fallen at full length into the very hollow she had been at so much pains to avoid.

Too frightened to call out, and, though shaken by the fall, too frightened to mind it, she started to her feet and set off running again ; and never ceased till she reached the far end of the Avenue, when, what with fright and exhaustion, she would have fallen again had not the young gentleman she was expecting caught her in his arms and reassured her of her safety.

Jane did not belong to a fainting family, but for all that it was as much as she could do to avoid fainting, and she had to cry a little before she could recover herself, and get rid of the notion that she had indeed beheld one of the ghosts her

mother had talked about, hoping to make her good and keep her out of mischief.

But on Frederick telling her that ghosts never appeared to more than one person at a time, and that he would protect her from a whole legion of them—she plucked up her courage, and taking his arm, set off to walk down the Avenue on the way back.

Frederick's words proved true. Nothing happened to frighten her this time; even the bushes were less troublesome, for Frederick cleared them away, or held the brambles back to let her pass, so that nothing occurred to interrupt their passage through that dismal Avenue, but when the end was reached and they drew near the house, they paused and spoke in whispers as to the best way of approaching it, so as to avoid being seen, should any of the servants be out and about on some business of their own at that particular time.

Frederick was for advancing boldly, but Jane was timid, and keeping a little in advance beckoned him to follow slowly, then stepping softly had the satisfaction to discover that the coast was clear, and all things favourable for the expected meeting.

Leading him by the hand, and whispering him to step as lightly as possible for fear of being

heard, she stole on tip-toe up the great hall steps, listened to make sure that all was still, then pointing up the staircase, directed him where to go, and told him in what room he would find her mistress.

It was a trying moment. The hall clock pointed to half-past eight. Her master would be back by ten, and long before that time Frederick must be away if he valued his life and did not wish to see his mistress murdered before his eyes as well. Everything depended upon speed and secrecy, and though at that moment her heart beat so violently that she was obliged to press her hand on it to prevent its throbbing, she went upstairs before him, whispered him how long he had to remain, and which way to take on coming out ; then pointed to the door, and nodding to encourage him to go in, crept below to remain upon the watch, so that should any unforeseen accident arise, she could give timely notice, and put them on their guard.

CHAPTER XIX.

ANGUS PAYS HIS DEBT.

LEFT alone upon that stair-head, and outside the very room he longed so much to enter, why did he not at once rush in and catch her in his arms? It was not cowardice. It was not that he did not wish to see her, but his strength failed him, his knees shook under him, and though he struggled to be firm, he felt the uselessness of the attempt, and the necessity of recovering himself before he ventured to approach her.

That door. Oh, how he longed to open it, to look inside and gaze on her he loved! An hour before he could have climbed up rocks or dashed down precipices only to get a sight of her: yet now she was so near, he hung back timidly, and scarcely dared to breathe, fearing she should hear him, or become alarmed, and scream on seeing him.

At last, and after he had regained his confidence, he turned the handle; then gazing and looking at her until his eyes grew dizzy, he felt his old weakness return, and could scarcely support himself.

Yes, there was Margaret! But oh! how changed, and how unlike the Margaret he had known in former days! She was so different, he could with difficulty call back the affectionate and confiding girl he had met in Yorkshire, in the drooping, pale-faced woman he saw before him now, or imagine that in so short a time she should be so altered that he scarcely knew her.

And was this change a proof of love for him—a sign of her unhappiness, and a silent painful witness of the grief she felt at losing him? Was her head drooping for him, her eyes gazing as if to look for him, and picturing him as she had seen him first, while he stood by observing her, afraid to let her know he was so near her, lest she should be startled and cry out in alarm.

But as she moved—turning her head as the draught from the open door fell on her—she saw what at first she took to be a vision, then in a moment found herself clasped in his arms and clinging to him in return.

Brought so unexpectedly before her, raised like a spirit, and at the very time she was thinking of him, and recalling to her mind their hours of early love, she could not control her emotions, but bursting into tears, suffered herself to be embraced and kissed, and never once re-

sisted, until the thought of her husband fell like a blight upon her, and recalled her to herself.

She knew her duty too well to permit her feelings, however powerful, to mislead her ; and though she could not love her husband, her sense of self-respect and what was due to him, had an instantaneous effect in checking her ardour, and in repelling the embrace that she had at first allowed on seeing her lover after so long an absence.

But though she drew herself away, and soothed him while she checked him, it was not so easy to keep back her tears, nor prevent her bosom heaving at the sight of one she had so deeply loved. He was her first beloved, her champion and her earthly good ; and meet him where she would, it would have been in vain to preach to her of coldness and reserve. She loved him still ! He had come upon her at a moment when she least expected him, yet in the midst of her excitement and surprise, she endeavoured to let him know that she was another's, and resolved to be a faithful wife.

To lose her soon as he had found her—to see her turn away ; shrink from his embrace, and hear her tell him of her duty to her husband—struck him as being cruel and unkind. He begged, petitioned, reminded her of her love,

of her original engagement to himself, and the terrible suffering he had endured through losing her, till overcome by his despair, she entreated him to be calm, and reflect upon the uselessness of making her more wretched than she was already.

All would not do. Insensible to reason or control he refused to listen, but falling on his knees, called her his own, his life, his treasure, and vowed that no power in the world should tear him away now he had found her, or set a bar between them to renew the misery he had endured since the day he lost her.

“And do you think,” she said, struggling to be firm though her tears fell fast, “you have been single in your grief, and that I have not suffered too? Look at me, Frederick, do you see no change in me, and do I look as a happy and contented wife should look? Is my face as fresh as it used to be? are my eyes as bright? or do you think these tears a sign of happiness, and the secluded solitary life I lead, the life a woman would wish to lead who had her mind at ease? No, Frederick, I am not heartless; I am not indifferent; but you and I must learn to suffer and endure, and as we cannot look for happiness on this side of the grave, let us mutually endeavour to assist the other in dis-

charging the duties we may be called upon to fulfil, whatever may be our sufferings."

He would have interrupted her, but as she held her hand to him to kiss, if he would only listen to her, she let him kiss it, and then went on—

"Your duties are the duties of a man; mine of a woman. You have to go into the world, and win a place in the estimation of mankind. Yours is an easier task than mine. I have to endure in secret, to weep, and yet appear contented if I would avoid that worst misery of all—domestic misery! I am married. I am wretched. But I must not even murmur, whatever I endure, while you can go into the world, and should you suffer wrong, can express your sentiments, as I can never do. I am a slave in everything but the name, and like a slave must drag my chain without complaining."

"Not if I can help it. I am come to carry you away and set you free from one whose name I have not patience to utter."

"Foolish, foolish Frederick: you do not listen to me. If you did, you would be more reasonable. Nay, let me speak. I am content to suffer; but not for you to suffer. I have brought my misery upon myself, and have no right to complain, whatever comes of it. You have not.

You have nothing to reproach yourself with, and therefore I would have you live to be the best and brightest man alive. I would have you talked about and praised ; held up as an example to be followed, and though I cannot share your happiness, you will not, I am sure, wish me to be indifferent to your success, or forget those happy days when you loved me, and I loved you."

"Loved ! and can you talk of love as possible to be forgotten ? or speak so coldly of the past ? But past, or present, to come, or not to come, nothing shall prevent my striving to relieve you from the consequences of this hateful match, and set you free from a man whom in your heart you must abhor."

"And is there nothing to be apprehended, Frederick, in trifling with a woman's reputation, and making her talked about, as I shall be sure to be talked of, if your visit is discovered ? My husband is away, but he has left his spies behind ! and should he by any chance return and find you here——"

"Let him come ; he'll meet a man who can protect himself, and dare him to do his worst. I am his superior in position, and his equal in wealth. I am, little as you may think it ; and anything that money can do to relieve you from his tyranny shall be tried, and tried successfully, if you will only listen to me."

“Oh, do not talk so wildly, but go at once ! Should he return sooner than is expected, or discover you have been here at a time when he appears to be more suspicious than ever——”

“Precaution is taken against that. Jane is on the watch, and should he come——”

“And have you placed me at the mercy of a servant? given that girl the power to speak of me as a worthless and suspected person? Oh, Frederick ! Frederick !”

“Again I say there is no fear. But oh ! imagine my wretchedness, and forgive me if I took the only course left open to me of seeing and speaking to you again. Listen to the dictates of your heart ; quit this roof, and let us seek in some unknown corner of the world the home we once so fondly pictured to ourselves as ours, when you and I first met.”

“If you have the least particle of the love and regard you profess for me, Frederick, prove it, and go at once, before some dreadful evil happens to make me curse the hour I was born.”

“If I love you? Do you require to be told of that, and do you not know it by every action of my life? Do you not see it in my looks, hear it in my faltering voice? Why am I here unless I love you, and if you love me you will not hesitate, but fly while there is yet time.”

Clinging to her—almost forcing her to leave

the room, and seek with him the promised land he spoke about—she was powerless in his grasp, and borne along, half supported, half carried in his arms; until frightened by his vehemence, she broke away, trembling but determined to let him see, that though she loved him, she would never consent to degradation or dishonour.

“And is it for this you are here, Frederiek?” she said. “But since you have so far forgotten what is due to yourself and me, I beg and request that you will instantly leave me. I may be weak and foolish, but I am not so weak as you imagine, for I would rather live shut up in this place all my life, than do anything to disgrace my husband or make me blush for myself.”

“And yet you say you love me?”

“I love you better than my life! Will that content you? Will that satisfy you, and induce you to be gone, and save us both a world of misery.”

The hall clock struck nine. In another hour her husband would return. Knowing the consequences of their meeting, and fancying she heard his footsteps in every sound, she urged and urged Frederiek to go at once, and not expose her to ruin and disgrace. Still he refused! till frightened at the risk he ran, she left off entreaty, and commanded him to go; begged him to forget her, and never attempt

to see her again if he did not wish to be her death.

In the act of opening the door, and while bidding him good-bye, and telling him to forget her, they heard a distant sound of horses' hoofs, and then a hurried footstep on the stairs. It was Jane coming to give the alarm.

There was hardly time to think or listen, before shrieking up the stairs, the girl called out, "Master, master! He's come home! Mercy save us, what's to be done!" then ran away to save herself.

Terrified at the danger she knew to be so imminent, alarmed for her lover's safety, and anxious to protect him from her husband's fury, Margaret lost her self-possession, until she heard the sound of horses' hoofs again, tearing along the road and drawing nearer and nearer at every moment.

She heard her husband ride up to the house, but before he could dismount or rush upon them, she seized Frederick by the arm, and dragging him towards the flight of stairs leading to the corridor, pointed below, and in a hurried but fearfully articulated whisper, told him to turn to the right when he reached the bottom, and go out by the door leading from the porchway.

A kiss, a prayer breathed for his safety, and Frederick was gone—gone while she stood

blessing him, and begging God's mercy on his head, for she heard her husband rush up the stairs as if in search of him, and knew that he would have barely time to get away before he was there.

To be certain that he was safe, and not to let her husband see her trembling and almost sinking with affright, she darted across the gallery, and ran into her bed-chamber just as her husband reached the landing, then flying into the old bay-windowed room, she looked out and watched for Frederick's coming.

She saw him now ! He had found the door, and was about making his escape through the evergreens, when to her horror she saw a figure step out from the shade, and just as he was passing, fell him to the ground.

The gleam of an uplifted weapon, the groan, and then the deathly still that followed it, together with the horrible certainty that her lover had been killed, struck her senseless ; penetrated her inmost soul, and left her huddled on the floor a maniac : shrieking and screaming, and scraping with her hands, as if to dig a way down to her lover, and join him as he lay, dead on the ground.



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